

THE INVESTIGATORS in

THE MYSTERY OF THE DEVIL'S MUSIC





in

**THE MYSTERY
OF THE
DEVIL'S MUSIC**

What's the matter with Bob? Why does the otherwise so well-balanced detective suddenly react aggressively to his friends, Jupiter and Pete? He seems to be under the influence of an unknown force. Jupiter and Pete follow their friend unobtrusively into the concert hall of a private house. There he listens spellbound to the music of a virtuoso violin player. And before they know what is happening to them, Jupiter and Pete are also bewitched by the music. Can they escape the spell of the devil violinist before it's too late?

The Three Investigators
in
The Mystery of the Devil's Music

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(from an idea by André Marx & Christian Strohkirch)*

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(The Three ???: Music of the Devil)

by

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(from an idea by André Marx & Christian Strohkirch)

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1. Collision with Consequences

Bob Andrews rode his bike into the driveway of Sax Sendler's music agency. Only at the last moment did he see a girl in a wheelchair, who was no less quickly heading towards the street.

Bob braked and turned the handlebar. The bicycle skidded and collided with the rear wheel of the wheelchair. Bob could just jam his legs down so as not to fall. A black case flew out from the girl and landed on the lawn beside the driveway.

"Hey, watch out!" the wheelchair user snapped.

"Sorry!" gasped Bob, scared. "I didn't see you."

"Then open your eyes!" said the girl who had dark blond hair.

"Are you hurt?"

"No!" she replied sharply.

Bob knelt down to pick up the case, but the girl beat him to it.

"Hands off!" she shouted, reached for the violin case and laid it on her lap. She stroked its surface gently.

"If something happens to my violin, it would be very expensive for you," she threatened and carefully opened the metal fasteners while Bob held his breath. She carefully examined the instrument. "Seems okay. You're lucky. Slow down in the future, will you? It's life-threatening."

"Well, listen," Bob replied. "You had quite a pace, too."

She sparkled angrily at him. "Go away!" she hissed and went on her way hurriedly.

Irritated, Bob looked at her leaving. Was he too harsh with his remark about her pace? Then he decided she was just a little hysterical. "She's out of her mind," he murmured and got back on his bike again.

But a grinding noise caused him to stop after a few seconds. He looked around. The rear wheel had a dent. He went down and took a closer look at the damage. He could still ride it, but if he didn't want the bike to continue to warp, it would be better to push it. Sighing, he parked his bike in front of the agency's entrance and entered the building. In one of the offices he met Sax Sendler, the head of the agency.

"Hi, Bob. Did you come to pick up the posters for the concert?"

Bob nodded. He sometimes worked for the agency on a temporary basis, doing work such as helping organize events. "I'll have a bit of a problem getting the posters back. I just had a little accident with a wheelchair user. She's all right, but my rear wheel's damaged."

"She was just here," Sax Sendler remarked. "She wanted to settle something about the chamber concert at the cultural centre the week after next. She's playing there."

Bob pulled a face. "I had always thought violinists were particularly sensitive and reserved. But she just freaked out a lot."

Sax Sendler sighed: "Musicians have never been particularly balanced people. Are you interested in classical music, Bob?"

"Not really. Why?"

"Because I have an invitation. Dr Stevenson from the conservatory was here this morning. He was invited to a private concert, but has no time. I'm not so big on classical music. Would you like to go?"

Bob shrugged his shoulders. "Why not? A little culture can't hurt."

Sax handed him the invitation card. "The concert is tonight. The address is on it."

"Thank you," Bob said, got the posters and left the agency. Only when he stood in front of the bike did he remember the collision with the wheelchair user. "Stupid cow," he murmured and pushed the bike out onto the street.

"Checkmate," Jupiter Jones said satisfactorily as Bob drove into The Jones Salvage Yard. The First Investigator was at Headquarters, sitting at the desk playing chess against the computer program Chandra.

Headquarters was an old mobile home trailer Jupiter, Bob and their friend Pete Crenshaw used as an office for their detective business. The trailer stood on the grounds of the salvage yard run by Jupiter's uncle Titus and aunt Mathilda.

"I'm glad you've come," Jupe shouted and looked demonstratively at the watch.

"I'm sorry. Something's came up. I had to fix my bike first. What are you up to?"

"Playing against Chandra," Jupiter explained, blinking up at Bob. "There was nothing else I could do... but I'm getting tired playing against a computer program. I need a change occasionally and play against a human opponent. How about it, Bob?"

Bob sighed. "If you insist. Do you enjoy winning against me over and over again? I never have a real chance."

Jupe grinned. "What am I supposed to do, play Pete? He doesn't even know the rules."

"How about Uncle Titus?" Bob suggested as Jupiter brought out a chessboard and the pieces.

"I had already beaten him when I was seven," Jupe explained while setting up the pieces. "White or black?"

They started their game, but Bob had already lost the majority of his pieces after ten minutes.

"Is it possible that you're a little unfocused today?" Jupe enquired.

"Yeah. I need to think about something all the time. Do you know anyone who's in a wheelchair?"

Jupiter frowned. "Nope."

"I bumped into a girl in a wheelchair today." Bob reported the incident. "She really pissed me off because I was too fast. She wasn't exactly slow either, so I gave her a piece of my mind. Did I go too far with that?"

"Why? Because you pointed out to her the fact that she was also very fast rolling on her wheelchair?"

Bob nodded.

"But she knows that," Jupe said. "I wouldn't attach so much importance to the matter. She was probably just worried about her violin. Just as you should be worried about this move with your rook. You've already lost one. What are you doing tonight, anyway? Pete is still looking for someone to go jogging with him. I referred him to you."

"How kind of you," Bob said. "But I have plans tonight. I'm going to a concert."

"What kind of concert?"

"I don't know." Bob pulled the invitation card out of his pocket and handed it to Jupe. "I haven't even looked at it yet."

"Check," Jupe said, looking at the card. "A violin night with Mr Vanderhell. I see. Never heard of him. Since when do you care about violin evenings?"

“Not at all, actually,” Bob replied. “I just thought it was something I had to experience. If I don’t like it, I can leave.”

Bob moved his king to a safe square, but Jupe was not impressed.

“Check again,” Jupe said. “And prepare for a mate within four moves.”

Bob looked up outraged from the board. “How do you know?”

The First Investigator smiled superiorly. “You should be able to see that at a glance!”

Bob didn’t see anything. “I don’t think so. Bet I can hold out longer than four moves?”

“You’re on!”

“Okay, if you lose, you go jogging with Pete tonight,” Bob suggested.

“Agreed. And if you lose within four moves, you wear a black suit to this concert—with a tie!” They shook hands.

Three moves later, Jupiter knocked over Bob’s king with his finger. “Checkmate!”

Bob stood in front of the mirror and pulled his tie back. It had taken him forever to put it on, and Bob was not one hundred percent satisfied with the result even now. He looked completely ridiculous anyway, and a crooked tie knot didn’t do anything. He combed his hair again before leaving his room and quietly crept down the stairs.

His parents were sitting in the kitchen talking. He doesn’t want them to see him dressed like that. “I’m going to Jupe’s!” Bob shouted, swinging open the front door and disappearing outside.

“Don’t come home so late,” he heard his mother shouting back before closing the door and hurrying to his car. At least nobody could see him in the car. Rocky Beach was a small town. If one of his classmates saw him like that on the street, half the school would question him the next day.

Bob drove along the coast in the direction of Santa Monica. His destination was a narrow mountain road just outside Rocky Beach, which turned off the main road and led into a remote area. On the street there was only a handful of houses, all very large and noble and hidden behind high hedges that lined the huge front gardens. But none of the houses looked like a public building.

Bob took a look at the invitation card—16 Hillview Drive. That had to be the house over there. It was private property. Then he discovered the name ‘Charkov’ on a large brass sign next to the wrought-iron gate. So the concert was a private event—or the owner of the house made his premises available for concerts.

Bob was wondering if he should turn back. He had little desire to burst into a private circle. On the other hand, how often would he get an opportunity to participate in such an exclusive event? He resolutely steered the car through the wide open gate onto the gravel-scattered driveway. It led through a large plot of land, on which huge oaks swallowed the rest of the daylight before they released the view of the building.

It was a large, stately house with bright and friendly walls that shone a light red in the light of the setting sun. Above the portal there was a balcony which immediately reminded Bob of *Romeo and Juliet*. He parked his yellow Beetle next to a long line of big expensive cars. When he closed the car door, he wondered if he would feel out of place here.

Thoughtfully he looked up at the two-storey house. He got a little queasy. He was sure there’d only be old people in there who felt terribly important, or educated citizens who talked about culture all night. And he would sit in between, not say a word, and be looked at crookedly by all. What was he doing here?

“Coward,” he said quietly to himself. “I’ll ring the bell now. They probably won’t even let me in. Then the matter would resolve on its own.”

He walked up the white stone steps leading up to the large, heavy wooden door and grabbed the door knocker—an iron ring in the mouth of a lion who stared at him in darkness. The metal pounded dull against the wood. Bob waited. After a while, the door was slowly opened.

Surprised, he looked at a girl with dark blond hair in a wheelchair.

2. The Creepy Violinist

“You?” she asked astonished. “You’re the guy with the bike. What are you doing here?”

“I... uh...” Bob stuttered and finally pulled out his invitation card out of the inside pocket of his jacket. “I’m here to attend the concert.”

The girl narrowed her eyes suspiciously. “You got an invitation?” She stretched out her hand.

Bob thought she wanted to shake hands, but the girl pulled her hand away at the last moment and pinched her mouth together. “The card! I want to see the invitation.” Bob blushed.

“I didn’t get the invitation directly,” he explained. “Is this a private concert tonight?”

“I don’t think you’re Dr Stevenson,” the girl ignored his question and tapped the name on the card.

“That’s what I said. The invitation didn’t go to me, but to Dr Stevenson, who didn’t have the time to come.”

“And that’s when he sent you?”

“No, he gave it to Mr Sendler from the music agency, who in turn gave it to me and—”

“So you don’t even know Dr Stevenson?”

“No, but—” Bob stuttered.

“Then what are you doing here?”

“I thought the concert was a public event and I could use Dr Stevenson’s card. But I guess I was wrong. I’ll be going.”

He turned around, but the girl held him back.

“You can stay if you want. The concert is not exactly public, but also not private. Since Dr Stevenson’s not coming, there’s one place free. Are you still up for it?”

Bob turned around in astonishment. The girl who was just so scratchy a while ago, smiled at him, rolled her wheelchair back a bit and swung open the door wider.

“Are you sure that—” Bob began.

“That you won’t disturb me?” she interrupted him. “Well, not me, anyway. And since I live here, I hereby invite you to join me.”

Bob smiled insecurely and entered the house. In a small anteroom there was the cloakroom where some dark coats were hanging. The girl pushed open a glass swing door with her hand and led Bob to a large hall, where almost twenty people stood in elegant evening wear and talked quietly. Almost everyone had a glass in their hand.

When Bob entered the hall, some interrupted their conversation and looked at him in silence for a few seconds. Bob felt the blood pouring into his head again and wished that he was invisible. It was exactly as he had feared—all those present were well over fifty and seemed to wear formal clothing every day. He was delighted to lose the bet against Jupe so at least he wasn’t completely out of line with his attire.

In order not to have to return the suspicious glances, he looked around the hall. On the high ceiling hung a gigantic chandelier, which radiated a warm light. The black and white tiled hall was dominated by a huge black concert grand piano. There was a wide staircase that led to the first floor, where there was a gallery that circled the hall and lined all round on one

side by a wooden balustrade. Sculptures were placed all around the gallery. They were mostly of white sandstone, sometimes abstract, sometimes classical, and stared out of cold eyes into space. More sculptures were also scattered around the hall itself—next to the wing and by the columns that supported the ceiling.

“It’ll be a while before it starts. Would you like something to drink?” the girl ripped him from his thoughts. What’s your name, anyway?”

“Bob. Bob Andrews.”

“I am Jelena Charkova.” Now she actually reached out to him, hesitantly grabbing Bob’s hand. “Come with me!” she asked him and steered her wheelchair over to the drinks table.

Without asking Bob, she poured him a glass of water, which he gratefully accepted. He was glad to be able to hold on to something in this strange environment.

In the meantime most of the guests had turned back to their conversation partners, but Bob still had the feeling of being watched.

“Who are all these people?” Bob asked.

“Friends of my father’s, colleagues. I don’t even know most of them. But they all have something to do with music. My father teaches at the Santa Monica Conservatory of Music.”

“Is he giving the concert tonight?”

She shook her head. “He only made our house available. The soloist is some unknown violinist from Europe. Vanderhell is his name or something. I only saw him for a minute when he arrived today. After that, he immediately went off to practise. It sounded pretty promising. I’ll be curious to see what he can do in front of an audience.” She sipped her glass and looked over at the guests.

Bob still didn’t feel comfortable in his skin. This place, these people and not least Jelena’s wheelchair unsettled him. “By the way, about this afternoon,” he started carefully, “I’m really sorry about our run-in. I should have been more careful.”

“Right,” Jelena replied calmly without looking at him.

Before Bob could reply, a man with light hair and a short white beard approached her. He had a strong Russian accent when he spoke to Jelena. “Did you invite a friend? I’m glad.” He turned to Bob. “Do you also play in an orchestra? Let me guess—Cello!”

Bob shook his head with a smile. “No, I’m—”

“He’s here by chance,” Jelena said to him, then introduced them. “Bob Andrews. And this is my father, Sergei Charkov.”

“Nice to meet you. What kind of instrument do you play, Bob?”

“I, uh... none at all.”

Mr Charkov frowned, as if he thought it was rude not to master an instrument. “I’ll go back to the other guests,” he skipped Bob’s confession.

“Why don’t you find yourselves a place?” Jelena said. “We’re about to start.”

“Where did your family come from?” Bob asked when Mr Charkov left.

“From Russia. Novosibirsk, if that means anything to you. We came to California about ten years ago.”

“Novosibirsk—I’ve heard it before,” Bob thought. “And your mother? Is she here too?”

Jelena shook her head. “She’s died a long time ago.”

“I’m sorry about that.”

“Me too. She was a great woman. I don’t know much about her, but I can still remember some things. She was a sculptor. She made all the sculptures you see here in the hall. There’s more of them scattered in the rest of the house. That’s why my father bought this huge house. He wanted every sculpture to have its own place. Look back there!” She pointed to the

sculpture of a little girl with a violin in her hand. "That's me. Or rather, it was me almost ten years ago."

"Awesome," Bob said when he took a closer look at the sculpture. "You have a very creative family. You play the violin and your father must have mastered a few instruments, right?"

She nodded and pointed to the wing. "He also plays the violin." Then she looked at the clock. "It's about time. Shall we sit together?"

Bob nodded. "Do you have a seat yet?"

"Yes," she replied and patted the armrests of her wheelchair. "I always have."

"I... I meant..." Bob stuttered and Jelena looked at him expectantly. For the third time that night, a blush shot into his face. "I didn't mean to offend you," he finally managed to say.

Jelena started to reply, but didn't say anything, but just shook her head without understanding. She reached to the hand rims of her wheelchair and set herself in motion to position next to the rows of chairs. Some people had already taken their seats. Bob followed Jelena and sat silently on the chair next to her. A few minutes later all present had found their seats and looked expectantly at Mr Charkov.

"Dear friends and colleagues," he greeted them, "I am delighted that so many of you have come to listen to a special kind of music today. I have the pleasure of introducing a violinist from Europe who has only recently moved to California. What he's playing tonight, he'll tell you himself. Say hello to Mr Vanderhell!"

Mr Charkov stepped aside. Bob raised his hands to clap and looked over at the stairs leading to the gallery. The steps were covered with a heavy red carpet. The staircase was like made for a theatrical performance. But no one showed up at the upper end. He took a quick look around. All the other people present also expected to see Mr Vanderhell coming down the stairs. Nothing happened.

After a while the first guests began to whisper with each other. Mr Charkov looked nervously up to the gallery. Bob looked over at Jelena questioningly, but she looked as helpless as everyone else. The audience whispered louder.

"Good evening!"

Bob flinched. As if out of nowhere, a large, darkly dressed man had appeared behind Jelena and looked over those present. He was very thin and his gaunt figure was accentuated by the laps of his tuxedo. Bob got a real scare when he looked into the man's face—it was deadly pale and emaciated.

The dark eyes lay deep in their sockets and the shoulder-length black hair stuck stringy to his skull. A thin smile scurried over the bloodless lips. With long steps echoing on the tiled floor, Mr Vanderhell walked past the rows of chairs and stood next to the grand piano. In his bony hands he held a violin and a bow.

"I'm so glad you came." His voice was bright and rattled in Bob's ears. It was hard for him to turn his eyes away from Vanderhell. This man had a demonic charisma that was hard to resist. "I will begin with a composition of my own. The piece is called *The Soul Catcher*." Without another word he lifted the violin to his chin and raised the bow.

Vanderhell started to play. He slowly stroked the bow over the strings and elicited an even, calming tone sequence from the instrument. Slowly he swayed his body back and forth. Bob immediately relaxed and enjoyed it. He hadn't known that he would really like this kind of music.

But suddenly a shrill sound tore the harmonic melody apart. In just a few bars, the calm music turned into a raging succession of aggressive sounds. Long bow strokes gave way to

short staccatos. Vanderhell's fingers moved faster and faster, which led to ecstatic twitches. His hair was hanging chaotically in his face and drops of sweat glistened on his forehead. He didn't seem to notice his surroundings at all.

While Bob watched and listened to him worriedly, he suddenly felt how the music captured him. The restlessness gave way to an incredible fascination that no longer emanated from Vanderhell, but from the disharmonious melody played at a hellish tempo. The sounds no longer took the detour through his ears, but originated directly in his head. And suddenly everything else in the world was unimportant.

He just wanted to listen to this music, let it carry him away and never come back.

3. Where's Bob?

"I'm not sure I understand that. So the pawn can move two squares on the first move, but otherwise only one? Why?"

"What do you mean why?"

"Why not always two squares?"

"Those are the rules of the game."

Jupiter and Pete sat on the folding chairs in Headquarters and like the day before, a chessboard was set up. Jupiter had distributed some pieces on the board to explain the possible moves to the Second Investigator. But he hadn't achieve much yet.

"That's a pretty poor explanation, Jupe. Rules have to make sense too, don't you think? It's totally illogical that sometimes you can move the pawn two squares and sometimes you can't."

Jupe twisted his eyes. "What do you mean sometimes? You're thinking that it's completely arbitrary. It's not. When you move a pawn for the first time, you can choose to move it one or two squares. After that only one square is allowed at a time. What's wrong with that?"

"I understand, but it's illogical. This rule doesn't make any sense."

"It's not a single rule that needs to make sense, but the whole game. After all, that's what rules are for."

"If they're all so illogical, I don't want to learn chess, I think," Pete moaned and defiantly crossed his arms.

"Chess is the most logical game in the world!" Jupe got excited. "The game of games! The king's game! And you're questioning the rules like it's still in the test phase."

"You insisted that I learn chess." Pete ignored Jupe's objections. "I didn't want to from the beginning. Probably you're just lucky or Bob is too good for you by now, and you're looking for a beginner as an opponent so as not to lose."

Jupiter laughed briefly. "If you could hear yourself, Pete. I'm just concerned about your intellectual abilities, which seem to have dwindled a little lately. Also, there's no luck in chess—just skill. So playing chess is excellent brain training."

"This immature game? Don't make me laugh. Find another opponent, Jupe, I'm tired of you." Pete got up and strolled around the trailer, bored.

Jupe sighed. "All right, I'll just keep playing with Bob." He looked at the clock. "By the way, he should have been here by now. Weren't we supposed to meet at three? Being late is actually not one of Bob's traits."

"Why don't you call him," Pete suggested and walked out of Headquarters into the salvage yard.

"I will." Jupiter picked up the phone and dialled Bob's number.

"Yes?"

"Hello, Mrs Andrews, it's Jupiter. Is Bob there?"

"He's upstairs in his room sleeping."

"He's asleep? Is he sick?"

"He says he's not feeling well. I'd hate to wake him."

"You don't have to. Let him sleep, Mrs Andrews. I'll call back later." Jupe hung up and frowned. Then he left Headquarters and went to Pete, who was just rummaging in a bunch of junk. "Wasn't Bob doing well at school today?" He told Pete about the phone call.

"We haven't had so many hours together today. But he was strangely quiet. Maybe he's hatching something. Goodness, hopefully he didn't infect me, the week after next are the athletics championships. I can't afford to get sick."

"Funny he didn't call," Jupiter murmured.

"Does that mean I have to learn chess after all?"

Jupiter grinned. "If you don't find the game too illogical. I'd love to teach you."

"All right, let's try it again," Pete relented and they went back to Headquarters. "So what was that about the pawns?"

After Pete left in the early evening, Jupiter sat alone at Headquarters tinkering with a voice recorder that had been malfunctioning for some time. Although he had infinite patience when it came to repairing technical things, after the twelfth attempt to solder two tiny cable ends together, frustration got to him and he slammed the soldering iron onto the table.

He took a deep breath once. Then he decided to leave the voice recorder alone for the time being and call Bob to distract himself. This time he had him on the phone. "Hi, Bob. Well, slept in?"

He grumbled in agreement.

"Are you sick?"

"I don't know. I don't think so."

"What is it?"

"I don't know. I just don't feel so good."

"You could have called this afternoon, we were waiting for you."

"Gosh. So I didn't call. Don't get upset," Bob exclaimed.

Jupiter got irritated. "I'm not upset at all. I just said it would have been nice if you'd contacted me," he replied carefully. But his calm tone had no effect on Bob.

"Yeah, sure, and here comes another one of your endless moral lectures. You can't let your friends down and of course you should always call. But you're infallible anyway, Jupe."

"Say, are you crazy now? What's the matter with you?"

"Nothing's going on. I just want to be left alone. I just didn't feel like coming over or calling today. Do I have to hang around the salvage yard every day?"

"I'm not saying that," Jupiter tried to reassure his friend. "But you can explain that to me reasonably. No need to freak out."

"My goodness, now you're offended too," Bob groaned irritably.

"What are you talking about? Did you get off on the wrong foot today or what?"

"Nonsense. Nothing's going on."

"Of course not. You're in a good mood today, aren't you?" Jupiter replied sarcastically. Then he got serious again. "What is it, Bob? Did something happen that I should know about?"

Bob sighed. "Jupiter Jones, don't get on my nerves."

Even before the First Investigator could say something, it clicked on the line and the connection was off.

For a second, Jupiter was completely surprised, then anger rose in him. "To think that he's not out of his mind!"

Energetically he put the phone down and looked over at the voice recorder. Now he had no patience at all for the tricky work. Angrily, he threw himself back in his chair and stared at the phone. He expected Bob to call again to apologize. Whatever is happening to him didn't give him the right to talk like that.

Jupiter impatiently drummed his fingers onto the tabletop. After five minutes he got up and walked up and down, which was hardly possible in the narrow trailer.

Another five minutes later he grabbed the phone and dialled Bob's number for the third time that day. Again, his mother was at the other end.

"Good evening, Mrs Andrews. I'd like to speak to Bob."

"He's on his way to see you right now, Jupiter. He seems better now."

"I see. When did he leave?"

"Five minutes ago. He should be with you any minute."

"All right. Thank you, Mrs Andrews. Goodbye."

But Bob didn't come.

Twenty minutes later, the First Investigator pressed the redial button on the phone and half expected to have Bob on the other end who had changed his mind. But it was Mrs Andrews.

"Did Bob come back?"

"No," Mrs. Andrews replied, unsettled. "Isn't he with you yet?"

"No."

"He told me that he wanted to go to your place right away." When she continued speaking, her voice sounded anxious. "I hope nothing happened to him."

"I don't think so. What's going to happen on this short route? Probably he just met a friend on the way. Oh, wait, I think... it's him. Yeah, he's coming right now."

"I'm relieved."

"Sorry to bother you, Mrs Andrews. I don't think I'm gonna call again today. Goodbye." Jupiter hung up and looked out the window of Headquarters into the salvage yard. Bob wasn't there.

Mrs Andrews had that anxious undertone in her voice that Jupiter knew all too well from Aunt Mathilda. Parents were easily upset and worried too quickly. That's why he decided to commit himself to this comforting white lie. It was enough if one had a queasy feeling.

He got up and left Headquarters. The sun just went down and bathed the western sky in a blood-red light. He crossed the salvage yard and went to the street. It was quiet. Only a cyclist passed by. Jupiter was about to raise his hand and wave when he realized it wasn't Bob at all. He turned around and walked back into the salvage yard.

Then he heard the phone ringing at Headquarters. Jupiter rushed back into the trailer and picked up the phone. "The Three Investigators, Jupiter Jones speaking," he gasped.

"Hi, am I interrupting your gymnastics right now?"

"Oh, it's you, Pete. No, I was outside. Is Bob with you?"

"Bob? No. The only reason I'm actually calling is because I can't get one thing out of my head. You'll probably declare me crazy now, but I can't fall asleep if you don't tell me the answer—do we have to move the king or the rook first in castling?"

"The king moves two squares towards the rook, and the rook jumps over the king," Jupiter explained curtly. "Both castling short and long. Did you happen to talk to Bob today?"

"No. But I think he's sick."

“Apparently not.” Jupiter told the Second Investigator about the phone calls with Bob and his mother. “Honestly, I’m worried. Something’s not right. I’ve never seen Bob get so irritated. He lost it for no reason whatsoever. And then he tells his mother he’s coming here, but he didn’t show up. That’s not Bob’s way at all. Something’s going on.”

“Really a little weird,” Pete agreed with him. “Do you have an idea?”

“Not a thing.”

“Maybe he’s got a new girlfriend, and he’s meeting her secretly.”

“Unlikely. That wouldn’t be much of a reason to blab at me like that.”

“You can confront him at school tomorrow.”

“Don’t call me crazy now, Pete, but I have a pretty strange feeling—a feeling that it would be too late tomorrow. After all, we’re facing a very simple question right now—where’s Bob?”

“What do you suggest we do now? Shall we look for him?”

“I had thought of that.”

“All right,” Pete said. “That actually suits me quite well. I wanted to get on my bike anyway and tear off a few kilometres. Whether I do it in the mountains, on the coast or in Rocky Beach, it doesn’t really matter.”

“Tear off kilometres?” Jupiter asked, unsettled. “Don’t let that turn that into a sporting activity!”

“Okay, it won’t be a sporting activity if you come with me. Meet me at the ice cream parlour?”

“All right. See you soon!” Jupiter hung up and wrote a message for Bob in case he should still show up.

Then he left Headquarters and took his bike to the meeting point.

4. Secrecies

The street lights turned on flickering and immersed the surroundings in cold white, while Pete and Jupiter kept turning their heads left and right in search of Bob's bike or his car. After they had searched all school friends, relatives and Sax Sendler's music agency, they rode aimlessly through Rocky Beach.

The coastal town was not very big and Jupiter and Pete had been on every road at least once after one hour.

They were just about to return to the salvage yard when the Second Investigator saw Bob's yellow Beetle crossing an intersection a hundred metres ahead.

"There he is!" Pete shifted up a few gears and stepped on the pedals. With his physical condition, he could reach more than twenty miles per hour on a straight track—enough not to lose sight of a car when the traffic lights were on his side. He raced to the crossroads and took up pursuit. The rear lights of the Beetle were just visible. Pete wondered if he should shout or wave, but something held him back.

After a few minutes the pursuit was over. As the yellow Beetle drove into the Andrews family's home, Pete turned off the bicycle lights and cycled as close to the house as possible, finally stopping between two street lights.

The First Investigator came only some moments later and stopped next to Pete. "And?" he gasped, sweating.

Pete pointed forward without a word, where Bob just parked his car in front of the garage and got out. The Second Investigator blinked. Did he need glasses now? "Is that a suit Bob's wearing?" he whispered.

Jupiter nodded. "Let's ask him where he was," he suggested and started moving again. "Hey!" he shouted as Bob was walking to the front door.

Bob turned around in amazement. When he recognized his friends, his gaze darkened. "What are you doing here?" he asked.

"Looking for you," Jupiter confessed. "Were you at Headquarters?"

"What? No."

"Your mother said on the phone you wanted to see me," Jupiter said.

"Have you been calling me again? Can't you just leave me alone?" Bob snapped.

"With your mood today, I'd love to," Jupe said. "But not until I know what's going on. First you totally turn on me on the phone, then you hanged up. And then you tell your mum you're going to Headquarters, but you didn't. Why weren't you there?"

"Something else happened," Bob replied curtly.

"And what was it?" Jupiter continued probing.

"Hey! Is this supposed to be an interrogation?" Bob hit back.

"Yes," Jupiter replied unmoved. "I don't feel like letting you pester me like this. You're behaving very strangely. What is happening?"

Bob's face continued to darken. "That's my business, Jupiter Jones!" He turned around abruptly and went to the front door.

"Sure. But not if you lie to everyone from front to back," Jupiter stopped him.

"I was at the movies!" Bob shouted upset. "Is that a crime?"

"In a black suit?" Pete asked quietly.

Bob looked down at himself, then he stared at the Second Investigator. "What's this all about? Am I a criminal? You guys are really great friends. Not even for one night can I get away from you. Instead, you snoop on me."

"We were just worried," Pete explained. "We didn't know where you were, and that's why we were looking for you."

Bob walked excitedly up and down the front yard. "I've had enough of this. You make demands all day long. Bob, come over, Bob, play chess with me, Bob, do this, Bob, do that. Then you snoop on me and interrogate me as if I were on trial."

"We just want to know what's the matter with you," Jupiter defended himself.

"Nothing!" Bob snapped. "I just want my own time! Is that too much to ask? Now get out of here! I'm tired."

"Bob," Pete tried again. "We're just trying to help you. If—"

"If you want to help me, just go!" Bob exclaimed.

Jupiter looked at him with a stone face. "Is that your final word?"

"Did I make myself clear enough? Shall I write it down for you?" Bob said, annoyed.

"All right. But don't expect me to show up here again. Now it's your turn. But take your time. I don't want to bother you." Jupiter turned around, got on his bike and rode off angrily.

"Have you forgotten anything else?" Bob impatiently turned to the Second Investigator.

"I don't want to argue with you, Bob," Pete explained calmly. "I'd much rather do it with Jupe, it's more fun. Why are we arguing now anyway?"

"Let's not do it then," Bob replied a little more conciliatory. "I just need some rest, that's all. Goodbye!" He took out his key, opened the door and disappeared into the house. Dejected, Pete followed the First Investigator.

"Now what?" he asked when he caught up with Jupiter.

"Good question," Jupe said. "The conversation went a little differently than I had expected."

"I guess you could say that," Pete remarked.

"Bob's completely crazy," Jupe said. "Okay, yesterday he told me that he was going to some concert last evening. He also lost a bet with me so he had to wear a black suit there. Tonight he was wearing a black suit as well. Would he be attending another concert? If so, why is he so secretive?"

"Hmm... Interesting," Pete said. "But what can we do about it?"

Jupiter was silent.

5. On Bob's Trail

"I'd think about that again if I were you, Pete. If you move the rook now, your queen will be in danger."

"Right."

While Jupiter was waiting for Pete's move, he fiddled with his voice recorder, which was still not working properly.

Finally, the Second Investigator chose another move.

"Now what about your king?" Jupiter asked.

"Oh, darn, I just can't concentrate."

"But that's a basic requirement for this game," Jupe said.

"You don't say. How can you be so quiet in this situation? Do you know how stupid I feel? I'm sitting on a bench here on Seaview Hill at the edge of the forest, staring alternately at the board of a game I don't understand and at Bob's house down there."

"I'm no different," Jupiter confessed. Then he grinned. "Actually there is a difference in that I understand the game. But I only play it to distract myself. I'm not comfortable with the idea of us tailing Bob either."

"Not comfortable?" Pete said. "Actually, it sucks."

"Do you see another way?"

Pete shook his head. "I'm afraid not—with the way he behaved last night. But we're interfering in matters that are none of our business. Bob was quite right on one point—he is not accountable to us and can do whatever he wants. It's actually irresponsible of us to snoop on him."

"I'm just worried," Jupiter defended himself.

"So do I," Pete said. "Yet the end should never justify the means."

Jupiter smiled. "Such noble words from you."

"It's true," Pete turned back to the board and made a move.

"Not bad at all," praised Jupiter. "Or was that a lucky move?"

"There's no luck in chess," Pete quoted the First Investigator. "Just skill."

He looked back down to the Andrews family's house. From this hill one could overlook a large part of Rocky Beach. The street Bob was living on was nearby. One could see with the naked eye whether someone was entering or leaving the house.

"Ha!" Jupiter suddenly shouted. "It's working again!"

"What?"

"The voice recorder!" Jupiter turned it on and off demonstratively, then put it in the inside pocket of his jacket. "The repair shouldn't have taken any longer, because it's getting dark. Also for playing chess."

"And too dark for observation. What do we do if Bob doesn't leave the house today?" Pete asked.

"Then we've had bad luck."

"How long are we going to sit here? Till midnight?"

Jupiter shrugged his shoulders. "No idea."

“This was supposed to be a joke. Wait a minute—something’s happening!” Pete exclaimed.

Jupiter looked up and closed his eyes to see the house below them. The front door had opened and someone came out. “Is that Bob?”

Pete raised his binoculars to his eyes. “Yes! Back in the black suit! He’s going to his car.”

“I can see that for myself,” Jupiter replied. “Let’s go!” He folded the chessboard half together and let the pieces slide into a small wooden box. Then he stood up, clamped both items under his arm and ran to Pete’s MG, who was parked nearby.

Pete followed behind, the binoculars still pointing at Bob. “We first need to know which direction he’s going. Now it’s rolling out of the driveway. And goes... towards... east! After him!”

Pete whirled around and ran to the car, jumped in, started the engine and turned. Then he drove down the hill to Rocky Beach. Soon he reached the coastal road. He stopped at the crossroads. “I wonder if he’s passed by yet.”

“I hope not,” Jupe said.

There was a lot going on on the road. Many people went to Los Angeles in the evening because Rocky Beach and the surrounding towns didn’t have much to offer. Jupiter and Pete stared at the passing cars, but Bob’s Beetle was not among them. They waited half a minute.

“I’m sure he went past! I’m going after him now, maybe we’ll catch up!” Pete decided to go into first gear.

“Wait! Wait! I think he’s coming,” Jupiter shouted. The yellow Beetle approached from the right and drove past them. “Lucky for us. Come on, step on it! But first let a few more cars pass so we’re not right behind him.”

“I’m not stupid,” Pete replied, waited a few seconds and then got into the traffic on the coastal road. “I hope he doesn’t notice us.”

Jupiter shook his head. “It’s dark enough already. When he looks in the rear view mirror, he sees only a few headlights, nothing else.”

The trip didn’t take long. Halfway between Rocky Beach and Santa Monica the Beetle slowed down and turned left. Pete followed him with as much distance as possible.

He could barely see the tail lights of Bob’s car. The street was located in a prestigious residential area. One villa was next to the other. No car was on its way. Suddenly the red tail lights had disappeared.

“What now? Did he stop? Or turned off somewhere?” Pete asked.

“Stop the car!” Jupiter advised. “Otherwise we’ll drive past Bob and he’ll discover us after all.”

Pete stopped, they got out and walked slowly along the street, their gaze strained forward. There was no trace of Bob’s car or Bob himself.

“He must have gone into one of the houses,” Jupiter whispered. “The driveways are all very long.”

“There!” Pete pointed to an open gate. A dark path lined with large oaks led to a stately villa. The forecourt was brightly lit. And under one of the lights was the sunshine yellow of Bob’s car. “We got him.”

Jupiter marched straight through the gate towards the house.

“Are you crazy?” Pete tried to hold him back. “Maybe there are dogs there! Or an alarm system!”

The First Investigator disapprovingly contorted his face. “The dogs would have barked when Bob went into the yard, and we’d have heard it. And if there was an alarm system, the

gate wouldn't be wide open." He kept going.

Only shortly before the brightly-lit courtyard, where several other cars were parked, did he slow down, until he finally stopped behind a thick tree trunk.

"Look at all those sleds. Whatever's happening right now doesn't exactly involve poor people."

"Except for Bob," Pete remarked, pointing to the small and lost-looking Beetle. "So what do we do now? Go to the door and ring the bell and ask for Bob Andrews?"

"Of course not!" Jupiter snapped.

"What are we doing here?" Pete asked. "So we know where Bob is now. Oh, great. And so what's next?"

"This is a private home," Jupe remarked. "Perhaps they are holding a concert here. Or could it be something else? We gotta figure out what's going on in there."

"Maybe it's just his new girlfriend's father's birthday party," Pete thought.

"All the better," Jupe said. "Then we can leave right away."

With these words Jupiter left the hiding place behind the tree and sneaked in the shade of some bushes around the house. It was very quiet in this residential area. No car. Every branch that cracked under his feet made him pause and listen. When they had circled the building for a quarter way, they stopped. Here, the house was not quite as brightly lit and with a few quick steps Jupiter had reached the wall and waved Pete towards him.

"Don't you think it's a little reckless?" he whispered when he reached the First Investigator. "We could be seen!"

"There's nobody here," Jupiter replied calmly. "We'll only be spotted if someone accidentally looks out through the window. And we can't tell that from here anyway."

Pete sighed. "You've got nerve. And if there are cameras hidden here?"

"Do you see any?" Jupiter did not wait for the answer.

"There you go. Come on, Pete, don't be a chicken. We just want to find out what Bob's doing in there. Once we do that, we can then we can He pointed up. "Above us is a window on the first floor, with the curtains drawn open. Let me climb on your shoulders so I can see inside."

"You? On my shoulders? With your weight?"

"Hey, I think you're athletic enough. Also, I've lost two kilos in recent weeks," Jupiter proudly replied.

"Yes. After you gained five kilos before that," Pete muttered, but then willingly squatted down so Jupiter could stand on his shoulders.

The First Investigator held on to the wall while Pete grabbed Jupe's ankles and stood up under great strain. When he finally stood on his trembling legs, he gasped: "This won't last long, Jupe. Hurry! What do you see?"

"Not much. A dark room. Seems to be a bedroom. Light falls through the crack of the door."

"How exciting," Pete said and knelt down again to let Jupiter down. "And now what?"

"Let's try the next window."

But none of the outside windows were accessible and so Jupiter and Pete gave up after the first attempt to find out something in this way.

"There is obviously something going on inside the house," Jupe said. "I guess there's only one way to find out."

Pete widened his eyes. "You don't want to be—"

"—In there, yes," said Jupiter. "I know how to. Remember the big balcony over the main entrance? If I'm not mistaken, the balcony door was ajar. I'm sure you can get up there

somehow.”

“Oh, so you’re sure I can get up there somehow,” Pete remarked, annoyed. “You know what I think, Juve? Your overweight and clumsiness are just camouflage to let other people do the dirty work for you.”

“And this conspiracy theory is supposed to allow you to push yourself,” Jupiter replied calmly. “We both know that you are our climbing artist. So do what you’re asked to do!”

Jupiter turned around and crept close to the wall to the front of the house, which was still bathed in bright light. At the corner, he looked up. “The door is opened, I told you. And the columns that support the balcony are certainly a good place to climb.”

Pete nodded. “I’d have to go up there. But with the lighting I could immediately announce on TV that I want to break into this house. That would attract more attention than I would like.”

“How? There’s nobody there to see you.”

“Nobody there? All someone has to do is open the front door at the right moment! You can probably even see me from the street.”

“We just came from the street,” Jupiter replied. “Have you seen even one pedestrian? This is a totally lonely neighbourhood. It would have to be a coincidence for anyone to see you here.”

Pete twisted his eyes. “It’s all right. I’ll do it—even if I am not for it. And if we get caught, I’ll give you the responsibility to settle that.”

Jupiter became impatient. “Come on! The longer we stand here, the greater the risk that we’ll actually be caught.”

Pete did not reply anymore, but scampered along the wall to the entrance, looked around once more before climbing up one of the two white sandstone columns that lined the entrance. The ornate decorations made climbing easier and he managed to pull himself up and reach the balcony parapet faster than expected.

From there it was child’s play. Pete climbed over the parapet and came to stand safely on the balcony. “It’s very simple!” he whispered to Jupiter. “Come on!”

“I don’t know,” Jupiter whispered back. “I not good at this. You know that.”

“Don’t waste any more time, it’s really easy!” Pete urged.

Reluctantly, but finally defeated by his own curiosity, Jupiter followed him. But when he hung from the column halfway up, he suddenly stopped. “I’m stuck somewhere!” he groaned. “I think my jacket’s caught.”

“Then unhook it!” Pete whispered back.

“It’s not that simple. I need three hands for that!”

Pete wanted to say something when a noise stopped him. A car approached. It slowed down. And suddenly two glistening light shone across the driveway.

The car was heading straight for the house.

6. The Music of the Devil

Jupiter stared at the oncoming vehicle. He was unable to move. Suddenly he was pulled up and fabric was ripped. He flew over the parapet of the balcony and landed on Pete. Pete moaned under the weight of the First Investigator, but did not dare to move.

“Stay down!” he hissed. “We can only hope we haven’t been seen.”

They heard the car stop in front of the house, the car door opened and closed, steps crunched on the gravel road, followed by the sound of door knocks. The front door opened, a few incomprehensible words were exchanged, then the door closed and it became quiet again.

Jupe rolled down from Pete, groaning. “Thank you,” he whispered. “Without your help, I would probably still be stuck at that column, and we would have been discovered.”

“We were lucky again,” Pete agreed with him.

“My jacket’s broken, though.” Jupiter looked at the long tear under the sleeve. “Aunt Mathilda won’t be happy. This was a birthday present from her.”

“That’s the price of your athletic inability,” Pete mocked. “But now let’s get our mission behind us as quickly as possible. Who knows how long luck will stay on our side.”

He opened the balcony door completely and entered a dark room. Jupe followed him. As their eyes got used to the sparse light, they saw a tastefully-furnished bedroom. Quiet voices penetrated through the closed door. Jupiter listened hard, but nobody seemed to be directly outside the door. Just as he was about to open it, the voices fell silent and soft violin music was heard. The First Investigator carefully pushed down the handle and let the door swing open a bit.

They were in a long corridor which was the gallery that surrounded the huge hall. From the ceiling, a glittering chandelier was suspended. Beneath the chandelier were chairs on which about two dozen nobly-dressed people sat with their backs facing the two detectives. All were devoting their attention to a man playing the violin next to a large concert grand piano. Despite the size of the hall, the music could be heard very well.

The violinist had his eyes closed while playing. Everyone else stared at him, so nobody looked up. Jupe opened the door further and hoped it wouldn’t squeak. The softest sound in this acoustically sophisticated room would probably have been too loud. But the hinges did not make any noise.

“So, it’s a concert after all,” Jupiter whispered. “Let’s see what’s so special about it.”

Pete and Jupiter ducked and crawled as close to the railing as possible. They saw Bob among the audience, and a girl sitting next to him in a wheelchair. There was nothing else out of the ordinary. The two detectives looked at each other. Is that supposed to be everything? A harmless private concert? No dark secret?

Suddenly the calm and catchy melody was replaced by a series of uncomfortable high tones. Jupiter twitched. The tune got faster and more disturbing. Jupiter looked down to observe the reaction of the audience. Then he threw a glance at Pete, who only stared blankly at the violinist below them. Something occurred to Jupiter and he reached into the inside pocket of his jacket.

The disturbing music continued on. Everybody was still sitting there stiff. Jupiter wondered whether the audience’s attention was real or fake. Did they really want to hear that

disharmonic fiddling? But suddenly it was difficult for him to grasp a clear thought. He had a feeling that a veil was covering his brain. Something distracted him. Finally it became clear to him what disturbed his concentration—the music!

He did not let himself be scared away, but the sounds were buzzing around his ear like a stubborn insect until Jupiter gave up and listened to it. The bizarrely oblique sound structure was hypnotic.

Jupe had totally lost track of time. The last notes of the music faded away without him really noticing. Only slowly did he return to reality. When the audience broke out in euphoric applause, Jupiter automatically raised his hands to clap as well. It was only at the last moment that he remembered. He withdrew back to the bedroom door and dragged the distraught Pete with him.

“Go on!” some people shouted. “Keep playing!”

Jupiter wanted to join the cheers. He also wanted to hear more of these fascinating sounds. In the meantime he had completely forgotten why he was here at all. He didn’t care either.

“Tonight I won’t play anymore,” he heard the violinist’s voice in the fading applause. It was an eerie, metallic rattling voice. “But I’m glad you enjoyed it. I can only stress that I am sorry not to have a better instrument at my disposal. In my opinion, this mid-range violin doesn’t do the piece justice.”

“Play it again!” shouted someone from the audience.

“No more today,” he repeated. “But if Mr Charkov gives me another day of hospitality, I’d like to play for you again tomorrow.”

“But of course. It would be an honour for all of us!” Someone else said.

“Then I’ll see you tomorrow. I wish you a pleasant journey home,” the violinist said, and then his voice sank threateningly. “But don’t forget our deal. Nobody should know about our little private concerts. I chose you as an audience because I know that you are one of the most competent music connoisseurs in California. I want you—and you alone—to judge my music. The composition is not yet sophisticated enough for a large audience. So, please keep our little secret.”

There was absolute silence for a few seconds, then footsteps moved away, and finally the sound of moving chairs and soft murmuring of voices was heard.

“We should get out of here!” Pete whispered. “Before anyone else comes up to the first floor.”

Jupiter nodded. They entered the bedroom, quietly closed the door and went to the balcony.

“Come on, let’s hurry up,” Pete said. “I’m sure the first guests will leave.”

The descent from the balcony was much easier than the ascent. Pete and Jupiter ran behind the thick oaks to the street and left the property. It wasn’t until they were in Pete’s MG that they dared to speak.

“What was that?” Jupiter asked. “What happened to us in there? This music...”

“... was absolute madness!” Pete exclaimed. “I never thought music could captivate me so much. I didn’t want him to stop at all.”

“So did I. But that’s not normal. I’ve never had anything so... I can’t describe it! I have never heard anything so impressive! I was completely out of it. It’s still weird in my stomach.”

“It was madness,” Pete repeated. “I want to hear that music again right now!”

Jupiter pinched his lower lip. “Is there such a thing? The perfect piece of music? A music that will delight anyone who hears it?”

“If it exists, then we just heard it,” Pete replied with conviction. “I’ve never heard anything like it.”

At that moment, some cars were leaving and drove past them in the opposite direction. Jupe and Pete were too lost in thought to notice them. They were still stunned, needing a few more moments to get back to their senses.

“So...” Jupiter frowned. “Do you remember the music?”

“Of course!” Pete exclaimed and started humming. But already after a few notes it broke off. “Uh... what was that again?” He tried again, but without success. Finally he smiled insecurely. “Well... It was just some crazy scuffle, not a real tune, was it?”

Jupiter nodded. “That’s what makes me so suspicious. It wasn’t a melody at all, but a series of shrill tones, not to say noise. Why was it so fascinating anyway? I don’t know what happened in there, Pete, but one thing’s for sure, something’s not right.”

Suddenly someone knocked vigorously on the front passenger window. They jumped up in shock. The door was ripped open.

Jupiter shouted in surprise: “Bob!”

7. Nothing but Questions

Bob had drove past Pete's MG in the opposite direction when he saw the two of them. Without them even realizing, Bob stopped his car and walked over to confront them. He looked darkly into the car. "What are you two doing here?"

"Why don't you stop running around. You're driving me crazy, Bob!" Pete said, unnerved.

"You're driving me crazy!" Bob replied, irritated. "I still don't know what to say. You've been watching my house and following me. I have really great friends, I have to say."

"We've told you a thousand times we've been worried," Pete said. "Isn't that enough for you?"

Now Bob finally calmed down a bit and got into the back seat of the car. "If you were worried, you could have talked to me."

"We tried that last night. But you freaked out," Pete reminded him. "We didn't know what else to do."

Bob sighed. "All right. There's nothing we can do about it anyway. But don't do that again, okay? If I want to be left alone, I have my reasons. And I want you to accept that fully."

"Detective's honour." Jupiter solemnly raised his hand. "Friends?"

Bob hesitated, but finally he smiled. "All right."

It took a load off Jupiter's mind. Now they could finally begin to concentrate on what had happened earlier in the Charkov family house. "So you've been there before and listened to this violinist?" he asked Bob.

"Today was the third time," he replied.

"Why didn't you tell us about the concerts?" Jupiter asked.

Bob shrugged his shoulders. "You heard Vanderhell, didn't you? He wanted to keep his private performances secret. Besides..." He hesitated. "Besides, I wasn't sure how you'd react if I told you this story. His playing is so incredibly fascinating that you can't get enough of it. You probably would've declared me crazy. So I'd rather not have said anything. But now you've heard Vanderhell yourself. What do you say to that?"

"I was completely overwhelmed," Pete said enthusiastically. "Jupiter has doubts, though."

"I heard the music, but I still can't believe in it," Jupiter admitted.

"What do you mean?" Bob wanted to know.

"I've noticed how I've changed," Jupiter explained. "I wasn't even clear in my head anymore. That was a crazy feeling, but in retrospect I find it very disturbing. I couldn't think right anymore. No music and no musician in the world is capable of doing such a thing with a person. Especially not with me and this kind of music."

"You ever heard of Paganini?" Bob asked.

Pete shook his head. "Who or what is that?"

"Paganini was an Italian violinist and composer who lived from the end of the eighteenth till the beginning of the nineteenth century," said Jupiter.

Bob nodded. "The most famous violin soloist in history. Like Mozart, he was a real prodigy. He could play the violin at the age of five. There's some really creepy stories about him. His playing technique was so unusual that he was able to elicit sounds from the violin that seemed almost impossible to people at that time. And he played so fast that his strings broke regularly. The audience was so enthusiastic about his music that some people fainted at his concerts.

"Jelena told me these stories and also showed me a picture of him. That guy looked really scary, like Dracula or something. So it couldn't have been because of his looks that people liked him so much. It was even said that someone who played so well but looked so diabolical at the same time should be in league with the devil. That's why they called him the devil's violinist. Normally, I'd think that was a fairy tale. But since I have seen and heard Vanderhell, I can well understand what people must have felt back then. Maybe he's the next Paganini?"

Jupiter frowned. "I'm trying to look at history from a different angle right now. Think about how people used to freak out at concerts of the Beatles. Or today at Michael Jackson's. I don't think that's because of the genius of his music. More like what the Beatles or Michael Jackson are—idols. Having said that, I have no doubt that Paganini was a good musician. But don't you think that the fainting spells had more to do with celebrity hype than with his music?"

"But the music of Vanderhell is brilliant," Pete contradicted.

"And yet you can't remember it," Jupiter remarked. "Don't you notice anything? You're playing with the wrong cards! It's not the music itself that got us into a rush tonight."

"What is it then?" Pete asked.

"I'm still thinking about that," confessed the First Investigator. "Maybe it was something in the music."

"In the music?" Pete said. "Jupe, you're talking in riddles again."

"Do you remember our very first case, *The Secret of Terror Castle*?" Jupe said. "The organ in the castle created a great feeling of fear through tones that were not perceptible to the human ear. Humans can only hear a limited range of frequencies. Infrasound is sound that is below the lower limit; and ultrasound is above the upper limit. Under certain circumstances, infrasound and ultrasound can have a direct effect on the human nervous system and do amazing things there.

"Maybe we're dealing with a similar phenomenon here. It could be that there are vibrations in the music which we do not consciously perceive, but has an unconscious but very lasting effect on our emotional state. Perhaps it is the particularly high tones here that trigger a feeling of euphoria in us."

"Fascinating idea," Bob found. "That would explain why we are so enthusiastic but still can't remember the tune. But the tune wouldn't be so important in this case."

"That's exactly right," Jupe said.

"I don't know. So far it's just a theory," Pete remarked. "Those inaudible sounds should be measurable, right?"

"Theoretically, yes," Jupiter said. "But even then a very important question would still remain—what does this Vanderhell want to achieve with it? Or does he not know that he produces these tones with his violin?"

"Maybe it's not the violin itself, but something else," Jupiter continued. "Or I'm on a very wrong track. I don't want to rule out this possibility either. Bob, what do you even know about this Vanderhell?"

“Not much,” Bob confessed. “No one seems to know much about him. Jelena just told me that her father makes his hall available for small concert evenings from time to time. He often doesn’t even know the musicians who play there. They contact him through the conservatory or an agency. It must have been the same with Vanderhell. I only know that he comes from Europe and only wanted selected audience at his concert. It was just a coincidence that I slipped in.

“Originally only one concert was planned. But two days ago people were already so enthusiastic that Vanderhell spontaneously decided to play again the next evening. He’s been living with the Charkovs ever since.”

“Apparently spontaneous,” Jupiter disagreed. “I don’t believe in coincidences. He knew what his music would do to people and planned from the start to play again. The only question is why. He’s not even asking for money, is he?”

Bob shook his head.

“Then what is this about?” Pete thought. “Maybe he did compose the perfect music after all and just wants to refine it in order to release it as a CD and make huge profits from it.”

“Anyway, it’s a mystery,” Jupiter summed up the discussion. “A mystery we should take up, don’t you think?”

“Since when is our opinion needed?” Pete mocked, but it was clear to everyone that he was already into it. “You’ve probably already drawn up a complete plan anyway. Come on, spit it out, Jupe. How do we proceed?”

“First, we need to find out if the solution to the mystery is actually in the music. And to do that, we’ll have to hear it again.”

“Tomorrow is the next concert. I could smuggle in our voice recorder and record the music,” Bob suggested. “Have you fixed it yet?”

Jupiter stared at him with his eyes wide open.

“Jupe? What’s the matter with you?” Bob asked.

The First Investigator slapped his forehead with his palm. “Am I stupid or what?”

“Interesting insight,” Pete smirked. “So what did you just realized?”

“The voice recorder!” Jupiter ignored Pete’s biting remark. “I fixed it tonight and I had it on me the whole time!”

“Oh, no,” Bob moaned. “And, of course, you didn’t think of pressing the record button?”

“Yes, I did! I recorded the music!”

“What?”

Now Jupiter laughed. “Yes, I recorded it! Shortly before I was completely exhausted, I reached into my inner pocket and switched on the voice recorder.”

Pete shook his head in disbelief. “And you’re just saying this now?”

“I forgot!” The First Investigator couldn’t stop laughing. “If you hadn’t mentioned the voice recorder, Bob, I probably wouldn’t have remembered it until next week.”

“I don’t believe it,” Bob remarked. “The concert must have impressed you at least as much as it did me, if you could forget it.”

Bob reached out his hand. “Now hand over the tape!”

Jupiter reached for his jacket, which he had hung over the back of the seat. “I hope this thing didn’t give up at the crucial moment.”

He rewound the tape, pressed the play button and turned the unit to full volume. The three of them listened curiously. After a few seconds of noise, the violin music could be heard—not exactly in the best sound quality, but clearly recognizable.

“I don’t know about you,” Pete began hesitantly after a few minutes while the voice recorder was still playing, “but two hours ago, I was much more impressed. Somehow—”

“Somehow this is just plain awful noise,” Jupiter added. “As I suspected. The hypnotic effect is completely absent. Whatever Vanderhell has done, one thing is certain—he has not composed the most brilliant piece of music of all time, but has done something else. Now we just have to figure out what... And how... And why...”

“Questions, questions,” Pete sighed, “nothing but questions. What do you suggest?”

“We must return to Villa Charkov. Bob as an official guest—and we both practise climbing again. This time without a jacket.”

8. Caught!

Pete looked at his watch. It wasn't time yet. Sighing, he lowered his hand and continued to watch Villa Charkov, although there was not much to see. Every now and then an expensive car rolled into the parking lot, people got out, knocked and disappeared into the house.

Jupiter and Pete didn't have to worry about being discovered. This time they were better prepared. Their dark clothes camouflaged them behind the big oaks. Pete looked at his watch again.

"It's thirty seconds later the last time you looked at your watch," Jupiter laughed quietly. "Do you think time flies faster when you look at your watch more often?"

"I'm so nervous," Pete replied. "I hope everything works out."

"Why wouldn't it work out?" Jupiter asked.

"Someone could close the window," Pete said.

"Bob would go to the guest bathroom a few minutes before the concert starts and open the window. I don't think anybody will go in after him. After all, nobody wants to miss the beginning. Calm down, Pete. It's really not the first time we've done this."

"Not that. But there's still a difference this time."

"And what would that be?" Jupiter asked curiously.

Pete was insecure. "When the music starts again, it could be that we feel exactly the same as we did last night, without being able to do anything about it. We know now that it's not the music itself that puts people into a trance, but it has to be something else. And until we know what it is, we can't protect ourselves from it."

"But that's why we're here to find out," Jupiter tried to reassure his friend. He turned his eyes back to the front and counted the cars. There were just as many as the night before. "Now all the guests should be here."

Pete took a stealthy look at his watch again.

"It's eight o'clock," Jupiter said. "Let's sneak up to the right side!"

The two detectives left their cover and scampered to the window of the guest bathroom. They had just taken their post behind a bush when the light came on in the bathroom. A moment later, the window was opened and they recognized Bob's silhouette. Then they heard the call of the Red-bellied Flycatcher. That was the secret bird-call signal of The Three Investigators. They waited to see if Bob would mimic the call again, but nothing happened. The air was clear. Shortly afterwards, the light went off.

Pete and Jupiter waited another minute, then they left their hiding place and ran towards the bushes. The window was low that Pete could reach the lower edge and pull himself up. Silently, he slipped through the window. Jupiter's climbing skills proved to be deficient again this time and they only managed to get the First Investigator into the bathroom with their combined efforts. Clumsily he rolled himself through the window opening and dropped noisily onto the tiled floor.

"Man, quiet!" hissed Pete. "Do you want to alert the whole house?"

"Sorry," Jupiter replied meekly.

"Sometimes I really think you're doing this on purpose," Pete said. "Nobody can be that clumsy."

“Yes. I can.” Jupiter got up and put his ear to the closed door. Quietly he heard a violin. “He’s already playing. That means nobody would bother about us.”

Carefully he opened the door that led to a long corridor. The weak light of a wall lamp bathed them in dim light. As they stepped out into the corridor, the violin playing became louder. The violinist had just begun his disharmonious sounds. They listened for a moment.

“Do you notice anything?” whispered Jupiter.

“I don’t feel a thing except that it is warmer here in the corridor,” Pete remarked. “The music here is just as loud as that yesterday when we were upstairs. But now, it has no effect on me at all.”

“Exactly. This unfortunately means that we won’t find a clue here as to how our devil violinist manages to ecstasize his audience.”

“You mean we have to go into the hall?” Pete asked. “But that’s impossible! We’ll be spotted there immediately!”

“Let’s see how far we can get.” Jupiter followed the corridor. The music got louder. After a few metres the passage made a bend to the left and ended at a door. “What’s behind this door?” whispered Jupiter.

Pete, who had a keen sense of orientation, did not hesitate to answer: “If I’m not mistaken, we will come out under the wide staircase leading to the gallery on the first floor. It should be pretty dark there. Actually, we shouldn’t be seen.”

The First Investigator nodded contentedly and opened the door a crack. Pete was right. They were under the staircase in the back part of the big hall. They could see the devil violinist and the audience from the side. The big, scrawny figure of the violinist flinched wildly while playing. But under the stairs there was so little light that Jupiter, in his black clothes, was sure that they could not be seen by the people. He pushed himself through the half-open door and peered into the hall.

Pete was amazed at the intrepidity of the First Investigator. He breathed deeply and followed Jupiter. When Pete stuck his head out the door, he felt almost instantly that the sounds of the violin had a completely different effect on him. Again this debilitating heaviness settled on his thoughts and he could hardly concentrate on why he was here.

Pete started to look for something—an object, a device, something with which Vanderhell could lend his music this uncanny intensity. He looked around the violinist’s surroundings, but there was nothing—no box, no amplifier, nothing suspicious. Of course, it was possible for the violinist to carry that something directly with him. In that case, they’d be here for nothing. Pete noticed how the room suddenly moved. The walls tipped to the side. He got dizzy. It was as if the music had a direct effect on his sense of balance.

Someone tapped him on the shoulder. Pete opened his eyes and stared at Jupiter. The First Investigator pointed to the wing next to Vanderhell. But Pete couldn’t concentrate on anything. Small colourful dots danced before his eyes. It was high time to get out of here. He turned around and went back into the corridor. There he breathed deeply in and out several times.

Jupiter showed up next to him and closed the door.

“I’m so dizzy,” Pete moaned quietly.

“Me too.” They walked down the corridor a bit and puffed for a while. Soon the effect of the music diminished, although they still heard it clearly. “The concert can only be enjoyed sitting down, otherwise you run the risk of tipping over. But I just thought of something—there could be some mechanism hidden in the wing. Unfortunately, we can’t get there right now.”

“What are you suggesting? Don’t tell me we should hide here and wait until everyone leaves so that we can check out the wing. I’m not doing that!”

“All right, you can go,” Jupe said. “I’ll definitely want to take a closer look at this place. Besides, we could try to find Vanderhell’s room. After all, he’s living here right now. So far, we haven’t found anything.”

Pete shook his head. “That’s not exactly true. We found out that the music only knocks you out when you are in the concert hall. I can’t feel a thing here. That’s amazing.”

“Maybe infrasound or ultrasound can’t penetrate the walls and the door,” Jupe said.

“... If your infrasound or ultrasound is even the answer to the mystery,” Pete remarked.

Jupiter was about to say something when a noise stopped him. A little further in the corridor, a door slowly opened. Even before Jupiter could make a decision, Pete dragged him by his arm through the next nearest door. The Second Investigator closed the door quietly as they held their breaths and listened with a beating heart.

A soft squeak slowly approached—until it stopped right in front of the door. The handle was pushed down and the door swung open. They had no choice but to push themselves against the wall behind it.

The lights went on. They heard the soft squeaking again. A girl in a wheelchair—that must be Jelena—rolled to the window at the other end of the room without looking around. She took a deep breath and sighed. The two detectives were still standing against the wall. Jupiter was partly hidden by the opened door, but Pete was not. They did not dare to breathe. Jelena opened the window. For a fraction of a second, Jupiter and Pete were reflected in the window. Jelena grabbed the wheels of her wheelchair, whirled around and stared at them.

9. The Suspicious Allies

The horror was only read in her face for a moment. Then her eyes narrowed and she cried: “Who are you? What are you doing here?”

“I...” Pete began. “We...”

“I going out!” Jelena rolled angrily towards them.

“What are you going to do?” Pete asked anxiously.

“I want to call the police, what else,” she replied angrily.

Jupiter stopped her wheelchair with his foot. He wanted to say something, but before he got there, she kicked his foot aside and continued on her way. Without thinking, Jupiter grabbed one of the push handles of her wheelchair. “Wait, we...”

“Help!” Jelena’s voice was so penetrating that Jupiter startled. He covered her mouth with his hand in a flash. Within a second, she bit Jupiter’s hand and he had to let it go.

“Ouch!” he cried. “We’re Bob’s friends! Bob Andrews!”

Jelena took a deep breath—and stopped. “Bob Andrews?”

Jupiter nodded.

“What is the meaning of this? What are you guys doing here? How did you even get in the house?”

“Through the bathroom window,” Pete replied. “Bob helped us. We’re detectives, and we believe Vanderhell is up to something.”

When the violinist’s name came up, Jelena widened her eyes. “What do you know about him?”

Even before they could answer, a voice with a Russian accent shouted from the corridor: “Jelena? Are you here?”

Jupiter conjured up the index finger on his lips.

“Yes!” she shouted.

“Did something happen? Are you all right? Did you scream?”

“It’s all right, Papa. I just wanted to get some fresh air, I was a little dizzy.” She opened the door. Jupiter and Pete pressed against the wall again at the last moment.

Mr Charkov was now at the doorway facing Jelena. “But I thought I heard you scream.”

Jelena smiled. “I was scared of a spider hanging from the ceiling right in front of my nose.”

“Since when are you afraid of spiders?” Mr Charkov asked amused.

“I didn’t. It was just so unexpected. I put it outside.”

“And otherwise, are you all right?”

“Yeah, don’t worry about it. I’ll be right back.” Jelena smiled got back into the room and closed the door. Then the smile gave way to a stone face. She looked at Jupiter and Pete angrily. “You owe me one. I want to hear the whole story.”

“We...” Pete began.

“Not now! After the concert! With Bob. Meet me on the porch behind the house. Now get out of here. I assume the bathroom window is still open.”

Jupiter nodded. Jelena rolled out of the room, down the corridor, into the bathroom and switched on the light. There she made an inviting gesture towards the window. “Here you are,

gentlemen! If you'd kindly climb through that window."

"But we..."

"Get out!"

They climbed out into the garden and Jelena closed the window behind them. A moment later, the light went off.

The two of them looked at each other. Finally Pete found something to say: "Maybe she's on it!"

"What happened? What's going on?" Bob excitedly came up the wooden porch stairs where Jupiter and Pete had been waiting on a garden bench for over half an hour. "Jelena suddenly didn't feel well during the concert and wanted to get some air. After Vanderhell had finished playing, she said that I should come to the porch here and that you two would be here."

"Shh! Not so loud! Or we'll be heard," Pete whispered.

Bob shook his head. "The guests have all gone and Mr Charkov has gone to his study with Vanderhell. It's on the first floor on the other side of the house. Nobody can hear us here. Now tell me what's going on!"

Jupiter told Bob the whole story.

"We have no choice but to talk to her if we want to prevent her from telling her father—or even inform Vanderhell," Jupiter said. "The question is, what do we tell her? Everything?"

"I certainly hope so," Jelena's voice penetrated the open porch door. She came out. "My father and Vanderhell are busy. So we'll be undisturbed for a while. And now I want to know who you are and what all this means."

The three of them looked at each other uncertainly. How long had she been eavesdropping? Finally Bob took out one of their business cards and handed it to Jelena. She had to hold the card close to her eyes so that she could read it in the dim light. It said:



"So, so," she said unimpressed. "The question marks are probably for telling your clients that they should question your abilities in the first place."

Jupiter started to explain: "The question marks are a symbol for—"

"Doesn't interest me. What are you doing here?" She turned to Bob.

He saved the details of their business card and told Jelena everything up to Jupiter's theory and the insights they had gained from the audio recording. "Tonight, Jupiter and Pete were trying to figure something out. But unfortunately, you beat them to it," Bob finished his report.

"Unfortunately?" Jelena was outraged. "They broke into my house!"

"Your house?" Jupiter asked doubtfully.

She gave him an evil eye, but didn't say anything. "So you actually think Vanderhell is far more than a brilliant violinist—or far less."

“That’s right,” Jupiter said. “You’re welcome to listen to the recording of his music, then you’ll agree with us.”

“Why didn’t you ask me, Bob?” Jelena asked.

“Excuse me?”

“Why didn’t you let me in on it?” Jelena said.

“But I just found out yesterday that there’s more to it than that.”

“You could have called me,” Jelena snapped.

Bob didn’t know how to answer that.

Jelena continued: “You guys are really great detectives. You break into the house twice without success. But you haven’t come up with the most obvious approach, which is to talk to the person who perhaps knows more of this than all of you together.”

Jupiter frowned. “With you? What do you know?”

But Jelena ignored him and continued talking to Bob. “When Vanderhell showed up here, I immediately disliked him—not just because of his looks. He hardly spoke to me, but stared at me darkly. He’ll throw me out of the room if I interrupted his phone calls. So I avoided him. My father thought that was rude of me. But he’s in the conservatory all day and he doesn’t get much out of Vanderhell. Anyway, I don’t want anything to do with this creepy person.

“I only overheard him practising. My father is a music professor and has taken me to classical concerts since I was little. I have heard some of the best violinists in the world. And since I play the violin myself, I know what to get out of this instrument. Vanderhell is without doubt pretty good. But that has nothing to do with what he does in his concerts.”

Bob frowned. “What do you mean?”

“He...” Jelena raised her hands helplessly. “While practising he plays something completely different! Not his wacky original composition, but classical stuff. But his playing lacks the... the effect—the magic.”

“Magic?” Jupiter asked sceptically. “I don’t think that—”

“You don’t know anything about music,” Jelena snapped. “Something about his concert music is different from the pieces he practises during the day. Or the way he plays it. Or the violin. Maybe he’s got two violins. It struck me that he kept stressing how inadequate his violin was and that he would much rather play on a better instrument. So I got the idea that his talk about poor quality was just to distract us from his instrument. Just as he was talking to my father, I sneaked into the guest room and looked at his violin.”

“You what?” Bob couldn’t believe it.

“Do you think you’re the only ones who can spy on other people? I wanted to find out the secret of his violin, so I looked at it.”

“And?” Bob asked.

“Nothing special,” Jelena replied. “There’s no secret. Well, he’s got a decent instrument, but not necessarily world class. I even played a few notes on it.”

“Good work,” said Jupiter. “Now we know that he achieves this effect neither with the music itself nor with his instrument. How does he do that? And why?”

“You actually think he’s gonna do something specific with it?” Jelena said. “I’m not so sure about that. He hasn’t made any demands yet. He doesn’t want money, he doesn’t want a bigger audience, nothing. The only thing he gets is free accommodation.”

“Maybe that’s what he’s after!” Pete shouted. “He might want to be in your house as long as possible for a reason. Probably because he’s looking for something else. Does your father have anything of value, Jelena? And have you ever seen Vanderhell sneak around the house?”

She shook her head. "He's almost always in his room. And my father has nothing of particular value. The most valuable thing for him is his collection of old original handwritten music scores from some half-forgotten composers. And, of course, my mother's sculptures. But the notes are in a safe and nobody can get them, not even me. And the sculptures have only a personal value for my father and me. Someone else might not be interested."

The light in the room behind them went on. Someone came up to the porch door.

"Hide!" hissed Jelena, and the three ducked behind the wooden bench. A moment later, the door opened.

"Oh, here you are. Aren't you tired?" Mr Charkov said.

"Yes. I'll be right in."

"Wasn't it awesome tonight again?" Mr Charkov said. "I have just spoken to Mr Vanderhell and thanked him for sharing this incomparable art experience with us. I wish I wouldn't let him go again. I've never seen such great talent before. This man is madly gifted! It's a miracle nobody's noticed him yet. He's had to play since childhood, with this virtuosity. How is it that he has remained unknown?"

Mr Charkov didn't wait for his daughter to answer. "He probably never appeared in public and probably never had the right teachers to support him. Even now he doesn't dare to play in front of a bigger audience than in front of our chosen circle. It's a disgrace! I can't get enough of his music. Too bad I'm never home during the day. It would be a pleasure to just listen to him practise.

"Luckily, he's playing for us again tomorrow. I keep trying to persuade him to make a bigger entrance. But he says his violin is too bad for a real concert. I don't see it that way, but he won't be dissuaded." Mr Charkov laughed. "Mr Vanderhell thinks you can only perform with a Stradivarius in front of a large audience."

"Say," Jelena began carefully, "don't you think he's a little strange?"

"What do you mean?"

"He hardly ever speaks. He has been living with us for four days now and I cannot remember having exchanged even one personal word with him. He's not a friendly one, anyway."

"He's just a bit reserved. And as always, you're suspicious. You got that from your mother." He laughed quietly. "I'm going back in, I'm getting cold. You should change your clothes if you want to look at the stars any longer."

"I'll be right with you," Jelena promised, and her father returned to the house.

The three of them emerged from their hiding place.

"Pooh," Pete moaned. "I thought your father would never leave."

"I have to go in, or he'll come back," Jelena said.

"We still have to examine the wing," Jupiter reminded her.

"We? What do you mean 'we'?" she snapped. "You don't really think I'm gonna let you continue to haunt my house?"

"Well," the First Investigator started cautiously. "We can also examine it together."

"If anyone here is going to investigate anything, it's me," Jelena said. "And you can save yourself the doubtful looks, great master detective. I am sitting in a wheelchair, but that doesn't mean that I have to rely on the help of other people for every little thing."

"But—" Jupe began.

"If I find something or come up with something, I'll call you. I've got your great business card. Until then, I hope you won't get unauthorized access to my house again. Apart from Bob, you're not invited guests. Good night!" She turned the wheelchair around, disappeared into the house and closed the door.

A little later the light went off. The three of them remained alone in the dark and looked at each other in disbelief. Then Pete grinned. "She's making eyes at you, Bob."

"Excuse me?"

"Of course. Haven't you noticed?"

"Well, I don't like her," Jupe said, grumpily.

"No wonder," Pete replied. "She either gets on you or ignored you... But I think she's great."

Jupe grinned lewdly. "I guess she reminds you of your tyrannical Kelly, huh?"

"Could we perhaps continue this exciting discussion in the car?" Bob suggested. "I don't want to be discovered by Mr Charkov or our devil violinist."

10. A Crucial Clue

When Jupiter arrived home, Aunt Mathilda and Uncle Titus were sitting in front of the TV. “Already back?” asked his aunt in surprise. “Normally, you’re out a lot longer on Saturday nights.”

“I’ll be off in a minute, I just want to get something to drink. Our refrigerator at Headquarters is empty.”

“Are Bob and Pete here?”

Jupiter nodded. “We have something important to discuss.”

“Oh, oh,” Aunt Mathilda said ominously. “Whenever you say that, you are in the middle of a dangerous investigation that you want to keep secret from us so that we don’t worry. Am I right?”

Jupiter smiled. “Nothing is hidden from you. You can see through me anyway.”

“So I’m right. I know you won’t tell me anything, but be careful!”

“We always are, Aunt Mathilda.”

“Tell me, Mathilda,” Uncle Titus said. “Could it be that you didn’t hear the kitchen alarm?”

“The kitchen alarm? Why?”

“It smells like the cake you’re baking for tomorrow is a little past its prime.”

Aunt Mathilda jumped up from the sofa. “The cake! Oh, my goodness!” Jupiter, who was closer to the kitchen door, opened it.

Thick, greasy smoke struck against him. He coughed and ran to the window to let fresh air in. In the meantime Aunt Mathilda turned off the oven, took a pot holder and opened the oven door. Even more smoke polluted the kitchen. Aunt Mathilda pulled out the baking tray and Jupiter took a look at what would become a cake and was now just a black, rock-hard lump.

“Oh, no. It was actually meant for Emily, who’s coming for coffee tomorrow.”

“Well, you can forget it,” Jupe said and watched his aunt dispose of the cake wreck.

“Whoa, what a breath of air,” she moaned. “It makes you really dizzy.”

“That’s right, I’m all...” Jupiter suddenly stopped and stared at his aunt.

“Jupe? Jupe! Are you all right? Do you want to sit down?”

Finally the First Investigator said something: “Huh? I’m fine!” He laughed. “Excellent!”

“What’s going on now? Don’t you mind the smell?”

“Yes!” he shouted with delight. “And that’s exactly it!” He gave her a big kiss on the cheek. “Aunt Mathilda, you’re just brilliant!” With this he opened the refrigerator, took out a bottle of orange juice and left the kitchen.

“Jupe!” she called after him. “Are you sure you’re okay?”

He didn’t answer, but went straight to Headquarters, where Bob and Pete were waiting for him.

“Hey, Jupe,” said Pete, greedily reaching for the juice. “Bob told me some new chess tricks. We should play a game right now. I’m sure I could beat you with a little luck.”

“I know what Vanderhell is doing with his music to hypnotize his audience!” Jupiter ignored Pete’s suggestion and put on a superior smile.

“What? You know?” Bob shouted. “How did you know?”

“Aunt Mathilda told me,” Jupiter replied.

“Aunt Mathilda?” repeated Pete. “What are you talking about, Jupe? Don’t make it so exciting! What did Vanderhell do to his music?”

“Nothing at all,” Jupiter replied and grinned.

“What do you mean?” Bob urged.

“Well, think about it,” Jupiter smirked.

“Jupiter Jones,” Pete said irritably. “We’ve been thinking the whole time! You think we can figure it out when you pull your Mr Know-It-All act? Speak up!”

“All right.” Jupiter crossed his arms, stretched out his legs and said: “Aunt Mathilda just burned a cake.”

“How exciting,” Pete remarked. “And what does a burnt cake have to do with our devil violinist?”

“The whole kitchen was full of smoke,” Jupiter continued unflinchingly. “I got pretty dizzy, and I opened the window. I was thinking of Jelena. And that there are several reasons why you get sick. Too much food, for example.” He grinned.

“You don’t look like you ever got sick from eating,” Pete remarked suggestively. “What are you getting at with this story?”

Jupiter didn’t get a chance to answer. Because suddenly Bob opened his eyes and shouted: “Air!”

“Air? Should I open the door?” Pete asked.

“There’s something in the air! Naturally!” Jupiter exclaimed. “That’s the only logical explanation!”

“In the air?” Slowly it dawned on Pete. “Oh, you mean the devil’s music?”

“Exactly,” Jupe said. “He directs some substance into the air—chemical fumes or a gas that on the one hand makes all those who inhale it euphoric, but on the other hand also completely befuddled.”

“You... you mean he drugged us and the others?” Pete asked, horrified.

“That’s what it looks like,” Jupe said. “This also explains why we felt the effect up in the gallery, but not down in the corridor. That’s where the polluted air just didn’t get to.”

“But is there such a thing as gaseous drugs at all?” Pete asked.

“Just think of chloroform,” Jupiter replied. “It’s not a drug in the conventional sense, but if you inhale too much of it, you pass out. In chemistry so much is possible these days, so I wouldn’t be surprised if there is a gas that has a euphoric effect on a person.”

But Pete was still sceptical. “But are there any things that make you believe that the music you are listening to is the most outstanding sound experience of all time?”

“There are definitely substances that affect your hearing,” Jupiter explained. “Or at least your acoustic perception. Because your hearing is still the same, you only perceive what you hear differently.”

“And all this without any harmful side effects?” Bob asked.

“Again, I don’t believe this.” Pete unconsciously gripped his neck. “What does that mean? Do I have ulcers in my lungs now?”

The First Investigator grinned. “Quite unlikely. But think about Bob’s aggressive behaviour yesterday.”

“I apologized,” Bob remarked, offended.

“That’s not my point,” Jupiter tried to appease him. “But don’t you think that might have been a side effect of the drug?”

Bob shrugged. “It’s possible. I wasn’t quite myself, I admit it.”

"If you're right, Jupiter—how does Vanderhell spread the drug in the air? He must have hidden the stuff somewhere in the hall."

"Maybe in the wing," Jupiter said. "Hopefully our lovely Jelena will tell us soon."

Pete sighed, "This would finally give us a hot lead. If Jupe's theory is correct, Vanderhell is drugging his audience. But why? Does he want to make the audience addicted? Then he'd have to make demands at some point. But he doesn't even charge money for his performances. At least that would make sense, say he takes a hundred dollars admission from each guest, makes his listeners dependent on his drug and indirectly forces them to pay more and more. It would even work because the guests aren't exactly poor. But he doesn't take a dime! What does he want?"

"Fame and glory?" Jupiter thought.

"I don't think so," Bob said. "Then he'd invite a lot more people."

"We just need to find out more about him," Jupiter said. "So far, all we know is his name."

"I'm sure Jelena could help us," Bob suggested. "After all, Vanderhell lives in her house."

Jupiter frowned. "I'm not so sure Jelena can help us."

The phone rang and interrupted Bob from replying.

"Who's calling so late?" Jupiter mumbled, turned on the loudspeaker so that the rest could hear the conversation. "The Three Investigators. Jupiter Jones speaking."

"Jelena here. Is Bob there?"

"Hi. Yeah, he's here. Hold on." Jupiter handed Bob the phone and whispered: "... Speaking of the devil."

"Hello, Jelena."

"Hi, Bob. Well, are the great detectives sitting in their office discussing the next steps?"

Bob ignored her sarcasm. "Jupiter has developed an interesting theory."

"He can do that? He made a somewhat limited impression on me."

With lips pressed together, the First Detective shook his head.

"Jupiter, uh, just looks that way," Bob tried to save the situation. "In fact, he is our mastermind. He came up with the idea that Vanderhell was using a drug to manipulate us." He explained to her Jupe's suspicions. In the end, Jelena was actually surprised.

"The idea isn't bad," she confessed. "I wouldn't have thought that the fat guy was capable of that. By the way, I've already checked out the wing."

"And?"

"Nothing. The wing hasn't been touched. After that, I took a close look at the whole hall. But unfortunately also without result. There's nothing hidden anywhere. If your friend is right, Vanderhell must have this substance with him."

Bob was disappointed. "Is that all you found out?"

"Not quite. I know Vanderhell's about to meet someone."

"Really? Who is it?"

"Someone called for him," Jelena said. "I answered the phone, and then got him. When he came to the phone, I went away but was listening behind the door. I couldn't understand much, as he spoke very briefly. But I did hear that he wants to meet with the caller tonight at 11 pm in a park in Santa Monica."

Bob checked his watch. "That's in less than an hour."

"That's right," she said and then told him the exact location of the park. "You have to go there and tail him. I'd love to follow, but unfortunately it doesn't work."

"Do you know who the caller was or what this meeting is about?" Bob asked.

"I don't know. The guy didn't introduce himself on the phone. You'll have to find out. You're detectives, right?" Blatant mockery resonated in her voice.

Bob ignored it. "Is that all?"

There was nothing more, and Jelena asked Bob to contact her the next day. Then they said goodbye.

"So looks like I gave her a limited impression, huh?" Jupiter started. "Interesting, Bob, thanks for the flowers."

"Well, don't be offended, Jupe, I had to say something."

"You could have told her, for example, to keep her mouth shut," Jupiter suggested angrily.

"We must not lose her as an ally," Bob reminded him. "Right now, she's our most valuable source of information. Without her, we wouldn't have a chance to tail Vanderhell. Besides," he added quietly, "I like her."

"You like her. How delightful," Jupe remarked. "Could you perhaps put your feelings aside until we've solved the case?"

"Don't freak out," Pete interfered. "You just can't stand the fact that Jelena finds you unappealing. But it seems to be mutual—at least that's how I see it."

"Yes, you're correct," Jupiter grumbled. "But well, I don't have to deal with her. I'm only interested in Vanderhell." He defiantly crossed his arms.

"Now leave your vanity out of this, Jupe, we have more important things to do," Bob said. "First we have to make it clear to our parents that it will be late today, and then we're going to follow the devil violinist."

11. Nightly Meeting

Bob had stayed at Headquarters. The danger that Vanderhell would recognize him was too great.

"It has to be there," Jupe said, pointing to a small group of trees on the side of the road. "So it's best to park a little further away." Pete drove his MG a little further and stopped. They got out.

"So this is the park," Pete murmured as they entered the empty green area. "A handful of trees, a fountain and a bench."

The First Investigator took a look at his watch. "Fortunately, we are here so early that we can quietly find a good hiding place."

"That's no use to us," Pete said. "After all, we have no idea where exactly Vanderhell wants to meet with that person."

Jupiter pointed to the bench. "How about this?"

"And what do we do if they don't sit down, but walk up and down?"

"How about this?—I hide in the bush behind the bench and you play a stroller who follows them if they go somewhere else."

Pete grimaced and pulled a bad face. "They won't talk about anything important if I walk behind them."

"You'll think of something," Jupiter said confidently. "I'm taking up my position now."

He went to the bench, looked around once and then climbed over some dense bushes. The branches of the bushes scratched his hands and he regretted not having assigned this task to Pete. But finally he had found a halfway comfortable position and waited. From here he could overlook half of the tiny park.

Only the moon and a lonely street lamp at the roadside illuminated the deserted park. Pete strolled some distance along the paved path, went to the road, turned around again and came back the same way.

A young woman with a dog came by. The dog sniffed irritably and looked straight into Jupiter's direction, but then the leash forced it to keep running.

After a few minutes, a dark-haired, full-bodied man in a shrill Hawaiian shirt crossed the park and sat on the bench right in front of Jupiter. He lit a cigarette and looked alternately left and right, as if waiting for someone. The First Investigator noticed his foot was falling asleep. But probably the slightest movement would have made the branches rustle and betray him. He endured the unpleasant tingling.

Suddenly a figure appeared next to the bench. Both Jupiter and the man on the bench flinched.

"You scared me," the first man gasped in a dark voice. "Goodness, Vanderhell, do you always have to come out of nowhere?"

The dark figure did not answer. Jupiter leaned forward carefully and took a look at him. Vanderhell wore a long, dark coat that made his figure appear even thinner. His skin shimmered pale in the cold light of the street lamp. The eyes were only two black holes in deep sockets.

"Won't you... sit down?" The man's voice trembled.

Vanderhell hesitantly complied with the request. "I have no intention of staying long, Withers. Do you have it with you?" His voice shrilled in Jupiter's ears.

"Here." Withers reached into his shirt pocket and pulled out a small bottle shimmering in the moonlight.

Vanderhell reached for it, but at the last moment Withers pulled it away. "It seems to me you're forgetting a little something."

The devil violinist's head whirled. He stared at Withers with dark eyes. "No, you're forgetting a little something," he corrected. Quick as a flash, his hand flicked forward and grabbed the small glass bottle. Withers gasped in surprise.

"Point one—you'll get your money as soon as I get 'Peisinoë's Song'. Point two—this here..." he held up the vial, "is a weapon. You should never threaten me again if you don't want me to use it against you." He made the bottle disappear into his coat pocket, which was about a metre away from Jupiter.

"How long will it be before you get 'Peisinoë's Song'?" Withers asked, intimidated.

"We'll see. I don't think I have to bother you again."

Abruptly, Vanderhell rose. The First Investigator flinched.

"You'll hear from me," said the devil violinist coldly.

"If I don't get the money..." Withers said.

"Don't threaten me!"

Withers flinched under the hiss.

Vanderhell turned around and left. Soon his quick footsteps faded away.

Withers sighed, lit another cigarette and after two puffs, he rose to slowly walk out of the park.

Jupiter breathed a sigh of relief and stretched his limbs before crawling out of the bushes. A few moments later, Pete came running.

"So?" he shouted excitedly. "Did you overhear them? I watched them both leave. That fat guy in the Hawaii shirt drove off in a car. And Vanderhell was suddenly gone. I had lost him for a second when a tree blocked my view, and then he was just gone."

The First Investigator frowned and told Pete what he had heard. "Too bad I don't know what was in the bottle. But at least now we know what our devil violinist is after."

"Oh, yeah? What is he after?"

"Peisinoë's Song."

"And what is that?"

"I haven't the faintest idea."

The next day Jupiter and Pete met at The Jones Salvage Yard. Bob wasn't here yet, so Jupiter persuaded the Second Investigator to play chess.

"Not bad at all," Juve said as he moved the rook two squares away, putting Pete's king in a hopeless situation. "Checkmate. But you lasted five minutes longer than before."

Pete grimly plucked his mouth. "That's right. You got me after 15 minutes, not 10 minutes. That's a huge improvement."

"Practice makes perfect," Jupiter comforted him. "Where's Bob? I look forward to his report."

"Here he comes! Thank goodness, then at least we won't have to play another game." They went to meet Bob, who came to the salvage yard on his bike.

"I tell you one thing," he gasped, "next time we'd better split the work! Then one of you go to the library. Why do I always have to do that?"

"You know your way around there better than us," Jupe said.

"Nonsense. Anyone can check the catalogues and browse through encyclopedias."

"Did you find out anything?" Pete asked curiously.

"Yes. However, I don't know if we can do anything with it yet." Bob got off his bike and went into Headquarters, where he took a big sip from the orange juice bottle in the fridge.

"Give us your findings," Jupiter asked him.

"All right, then." Bob opened his backpack and took out the photocopies he had made at the library. "Peisinoë is a Siren. Sirens are figures from Greek mythology. They are often portrayed as half-woman and half-bird and they live on an island. As soon as a ship comes along, they lure the sailors with their enchanting music and singing voices. The sailors get entranced and eventually dies either by leaping into the sea or when the ship crashes on the rocky coast of the island.

"The most famous story about the Sirens is in *The Odyssey*. There the hero, Odysseus, blocks the ears of his sailors with wax so that they can't hear the hypnotic music and singing. He lets himself be tied to a ship's mast, because he wants to listen to the sirens at all costs, but does not want to run the risk of jumping into the sea because of all the ecstasy. So he and his sailors are among the few who have survived an encounter with the sirens."

"What does this remind us of?" Pete asked. "Hypnotic music, ecstasy—sounds like our devil violinist. With the small difference that he uses an instrument instead of singing. So 'Peisinoë's Song' is the singing of a siren."

"Translated, her name means as much as 'the sensual one', by the way," Bob explained. "It fits, doesn't it?"

"I just don't understand what Vanderhell means when he says he wants to get 'Peisinoë's Song'," Jupiter muttered.

"I'm afraid I don't understand that either. Because that's all I've found out about Peisinoë."

"That's a little meagre. Now we still don't know what Vanderhell wants. Have you looked in any music books connected to Peisinoë?"

Bob hit his forehead with his hand. "Of course! I forgot—idiot."

"Then why don't you just make up for it," Jupiter suggested.

"So will I."

The First Investigator looked at him with a challenge. "What are you waiting for?"

"Do you think I should go to the library now?" Bob asked in horror.

"Of course. Then when?"

"But I just came from there!"

"It's your own fault."

Bob took a deep breath. "Why do I always have to do this?"

Jupiter grinned. "Because you're—"

"Because I know my way around better than the two of you," Bob sighed. "Yeah, yeah, all right. I'm on my way. See you later!" He stood up, sighing, and left Headquarters.

Bob was gone for two minutes when the phone rang.

"The Three Investigators. Jupiter Jones speaking."

"Is Bob there?" That was Jelena's voice.

"No, he just went off. But he should be back in half an hour."

"It's too long. You must come now! My father and Vanderhell are not here. This is a unique opportunity to examine the hall and Vanderhell's room!"

12. On the Devil's Trail

It was the first time Jupiter and Pete saw the Charkov house in daylight. In the sun, it made a friendly and inviting impression that they could hardly imagine having experienced such eerie things inside the house at night. There wasn't a single car in the yard today either. They had deliberately parked Pete's car on the street so as not to be discovered—just in case.

When Pete rang the bell, it took a while for Jelena to open.

She looked exhausted. Her dark blond hair was pinned up, but a few strands had come loose and were hanging in her face. "Hi. Good of you to come so quickly. What about Bob?"

"We left a note for him at Headquarters. As soon as he's back, he'll come," Jupiter replied.

"Headquarters? What's that?"

"Our office," Jupiter said.

"Your office. I see what you mean. What great detectives need," Jelena replied sarcastically.

Jupiter took in his breath sharply. "Let's get to the point!" he exclaimed. "What exactly are we supposed to do?"

"Help me search the house," Jelena replied.

"I am quite agile in my go-kart, but there are some places in the house where it gets complicated. My father took Vanderhell to see a colleague. They'll be gone at least two hours. There won't be a better opportunity again. The guy's usually here all day." She rolled back a bit. "Come on in."

"Are you sure? Yesterday you just wanted to let Bob into your house," Jupiter remembered biting.

"Well, listen, after all, you did break in here! It's not often that I would invite burglars back with open arms," Jelena said with a sarcastic tone.

"But as soon as you need our help, you don't care, or how can I understand that?" Jupiter asked.

Jelena was about to say something when Pete beat her to it: "Could you two perhaps postpone your little war for a while? We're on the same side, haven't you noticed? Let's get to work as long as we have time!" He entered the house without waiting for an answer.

The concert hall looked almost like the evening before. Since it was in the middle of the house, there were no windows, so the only light source was the huge chandelier. The chairs for the guests had disappeared. A large, dark red carpet was half rolled up next to the wing.

"I checked to see if there was anything hidden under there," explained Jelena. "Nothing."

Pete didn't dare ask how she had managed to roll up the carpet from the wheelchair, so he looked around for possible hiding places she can't reach.

"The chandelier," he finally said. "How about it? It's so big you could easily hide something in it."

"I've thought of that," said Jelena. "And that's why you're here, because I can't get at that thing for the life of me."

"Neither can we," Pete remarked. "Not without a ladder, anyway."

“There’s one in the broom closet. Jupiter, will you go get it? Through this corridor, second door on the left.”

The First Investigator cleared his throat loudly. “Am I the sidekick now?”

“I’ll get it,” Pete said quickly and disappeared. When he came back with the folding ladder, Jupiter and Jelena were already in some discussion again. He decided to ignore them, set up the ladder and climbed up to the chandelier. Carefully he touched the sparkling glass pieces, pushed them apart to take a look inside the chandelier, but there was nothing unusual. Disappointed, he climbed down again. “Nothing. Have you examined the sculptures yet?”

“Of course. I have checked those that are down here in the hall,” Jelena replied. “For those in the gallery, you’ll have to do that.”

“What about Vanderhell’s room?” Jupiter asked.

“I was inside. But there’s not much to see. He only brought one suitcase.”

“I’d still like to see it anyway,” Jupiter said.

Jelena shrugged. “All right. It’s on the first floor. The last room in the corridor.”

“On the first floor?” Jupiter looked at the wheelchair.

“There is a lift,” explained Jelena, who had correctly guessed the doubts of the First Investigator. “When my father bought the house, it was a freight lift. We rebuilt it so that I could move freely around the house without having to build such an ugly wheelchair transporter on the stairs.”

Jupiter nodded, embarrassed. He turned around and went up the stairs. The devil violinist’s room was sparsely furnished—a bed, a closet, table and chair. That was all.

There was a suitcase under the bed. Jupiter opened it. But there was nothing but clothes and a few notes. He leafed through the music books and scanned the inner lining of the case for a secret compartment.

As he searched the pockets of the shirts, he found an empty brown glass bottle. It had no label and was provided with a plastic screw cap. Jupiter opened it and sniffed it carefully.

Suddenly he got dizzy. Although he hadn’t smelled anything, the fumes must have escaped from the vial. He felt strangely light and hazy. When he turned the cap back on the bottle, the sound of plastic on glass was loud and clear in his ear. The rustling of his clothes also seemed unusually intense to him. Only after half a minute did the feeling subside and his hearing returned to normal. Relieved, he breathed deeply once and put everything back as he had found it.

Then he examined the violin, which lay in a case on the bed. But the instrument looked quite ordinary. He took another look around the small room. There was hardly any space. If Vanderhell had any other secrets, it couldn’t be in this room.

He went back to the gallery and looked at the hall from above, where Jelena just rolled back the carpet with the wheelchair and Pete picked a bouquet of dried flowers.

“I’ve found something,” Jupiter said and reported his discovery.

“That’s very interesting,” said Jelena. “Pete just told me about your thoughts and observations last night. Was it that bottle Vanderhell put in his pocket yesterday?”

“I don’t think so,” Jupiter replied. “Because the bottle in his suitcase was empty.”

“Empty?” Pete asked irritably. “But you just said the fumes from it knocked you out. So at least there was this hypnotic stuff in it.”

“The rest of it. I’m assuming it’s a liquid that evaporates rapidly. Last night Vanderhell got a new bottle because his supply was exhausted.”

“I don’t know,” Jelena said sceptically. “How is he going to release the fumes? I certainly didn’t see him march through the hall with a small bottle before his performance.”

“He must have some device that can spread the drug,” suspected the First Investigator. “And it must be hidden here.”

“So now we’re looking for a mysterious device and the reason why Vanderhell does the magic—something valuable hidden somewhere in the house,” Pete summarized. “Let’s get on with the search.” He turned around and went up to the gallery to examine the wooden balustrade.

Jupiter devoted his attention to the sculptures. The creations of Jelena’s mother, carved in white stone, stood everywhere and watched the three indifferently. As Jupiter looked closer, he recognized some of the figures—the one with the legs and horns of a goat was Pan, the Greek shepherd god; a nymph who sat on a stone next to it; then a little girl who played the violin. Jupiter then moved along to other figures.

Suddenly he flinched. Directly in front of him stood a demonic figure in long flowing robes which looked at him with the empty eye sockets of a skull. His bony fingers played a violin. A slight shiver ran over Jupiter’s back as he looked closer at the devilish grin. He had often seen works of art depicting death as a fiddling skeleton, but this was by far the most impressive.

Suddenly Jupe thought of something. “Jelena! Is there a statue of a woman somewhere in the house, half human, half bird?”

“You mean Peisinoë?” She shook her head and laughed as she saw the surprised face of the First Investigator. “Yes, I know what sirens look like. Do you think only you would know? But even if there was a Peisinoë statue, I don’t think Vanderhell is after my mother’s sculpture.”

“Well, it could have been something hidden inside,” Jupiter thought.

Jelena frowned. “No. Then my mother would have done it ten years ago. I don’t know anything that was supposed to be hidden or how Vanderhell would know about it.”

“Calm down, it was just a theory,” Jupiter moaned.

“Think before you make any speculations,” Jelena snapped.

Jupiter was boiling inside, but he swallowed his anger and refrained from saying anything more. This Jelena couldn’t be argued with anyway. It was clear that she absolutely wanted to have the last word every time. The First Investigator then decided not to engage in any more arguments with her—at least during an investigation.

The three of them examined every nook and cranny of the large hall, checked every single sculpture, scanned every column of the wooden balustrade—with no result.

Nowhere was a device hidden that Vanderhell could have used to release his diabolical drug.

After about an hour, Jupe and Pete let themselves sink exhausted on the stairs.

“I guess that was a flop,” Pete remarked. “We didn’t find anything at all. Whatever Vanderhell does, he leaves no trace. He must carry the drug with him at all times.”

“That’s illogical,” Jupiter disagreed. “Unfortunately, I have no alternative solution to offer at this time.”

“And what do detectives do in such a case?” Jelena asked.

“We have to...” Jupiter was interrupted by the door knocker.

The three of them looked at each other in alarm. Pete whispered: “It’s either Bob or—”

“Quick, hide!” Jelena whispered and waved her hand.

Jupe and Pete ran up the stairs to the gallery and ducked behind a sculpture while Jelena disappeared into the anteroom and rolled to the front door. The two detectives listened with bated breath.

Indistinct voices were heard. Then the door to the hall opened.

"You can come out!" Bob shouted in a good mood. Pete and Jupiter breathed a sigh of relief and left their hiding place as Jelena and Bob entered the hall.

"Have you succeeded in your search?" Bob asked eagerly. But when they said no, he hardly seemed disappointed.

"But I did," he said triumphantly. "I've been leafing through some music books and I've actually found out something." He paused theatrically.

"Please don't do the Jupiter Jones act now, Bob," Pete groaned. "Get to the point!"

"I didn't find anything under Peisinoë. But I found records of 'Peisinoë's Song' a few times. This has nothing to do with Greek mythology, but *Peisinoë's Song* is a piece of music. To be exact, a piece for solo violin by a rather unknown Russian composer. I don't remember the name, but I wrote it down, wait a minute."

While Bob was digging for his notebook in his jacket pocket, Pete murmured: "A piece of music for solo violin. That's a good match. But I still don't really understand it. What does Vanderhell mean when he says he wants to get *Peisinoë's Song*?" He turned to Jelena, but she could only shrug.

"Here you go!" Bob said and read from his notes: "The composer of *Peisinoë's Song* is called Pavel Mogorov. He lived in Russia from 1867 to 1930. He composed little and his works are hardly known today, so there is not much to be found about him."

"Wait a minute!" Jelena stared at Bob. "Pavel Mogorov!"

"Did I pronounce it wrong?" Bob asked, embarrassed.

"Some of my father's original music scores are by Pavel Mogorov!"

"Excuse me?" Jupiter cried. "Say that again!"

"Are you deaf? I told you my father has a little collection of old music scores. He started collecting when we lived in Russia. Most of the original scores of which he has, are hardly known, but are valuable by their age alone. Sometimes he lends them to exhibitions, but most of the time they are here in the house, in his safe. Very rarely have I ever played pieces from his collection. I remember Mogorov was there. But I didn't like him so much, I think Italian composers are better."

"Unbelievable! Do you know if *Peisinoë's Song* is in it?" Jupiter asked.

"If I knew, I'd have told you by now," she replied angrily. "I've never heard that name before. But that doesn't mean anything. As I said, my father rarely takes the music scores out of the safe."

"Where is the safe?" Bob asked.

"In his study."

"Key or combination lock?"

"Combination lock."

"Do you know the combination?"

She shook her head.

"Where's the study?"

"You don't want to—"

"Where?"

13. *Peisinoë's Song*

The Three Investigators were crouching in front of the small steel safe that stood half-hidden behind a curtain in a corner of Mr Charkov's study upstairs. Jelena went up in the lift, joined them there and now watched with a mixture of curiosity and fear.

"I don't know," she said once again. "Maybe we should wait until my father gets back after all."

"But then Vanderhell will certainly be with him," Jupiter said. "It can take forever for you to speak to him alone, and you have to explain the whole story to him first. Will he believe you?"

"Of course he'll believe me," Jelena replied, outraged.

"Maybe our suspicion is not confirmed at all and your father is not in possession of *Peisinoë's Song*," Jupiter continued, unimpressed. "Then we'll look stupid and have no evidence against Vanderhell in our hands. I'd like to avoid the risk."

Jelena sighed. "I'm not comfortable with this either. On the other hand, you're right."

Jupiter raised his eyebrows in surprise. He had no longer counted on Jelena ever getting his approval.

"But how will you open the safe?" Jelena asked.

"Shh!" Pete whispered and raised his index finger. Then he put his ear to the safe door and carefully turned the number wheel. The others held their breath.

Pete turned for about a minute, but nothing happened. "Darn," he said. "It doesn't work."

"Do you know how to do that?" Jelena asked, astonished.

The Second Investigator grinned, embarrassed. "Not really. But that's how it always looks in movies."

She twisted her eyes. "Do you get all your detective knowledge from movies? Then it's amazing you've ever solved a case."

"Maybe your father wrote down the combination somewhere," Bob thought.

But Jelena laughed. "No way! He has a memory like an elephant. He'd never write down a number. He doesn't even have an address book or a phone book."

Jupiter pinched his lower lip. "When's your birthday?" he finally asked.

"What's Jelena's birthday got to do with it?" Pete moaned. "I thought we wanted to knick this vault!"

But Jelena understood what Jupe was getting at. "Try the one-eight-zero-four combination." Pete looked at her without understanding.

"18th April is my birthday," she explained. "Eighteenth Four—one-eight-zero-four."

"Ah, now I see. Not a stupid thought at all," Pete said and tried out the sequence of numbers. Tensely he pulled the handle of the safe, but nothing moved. "Nothing. I'll try zero-four-one-eight." Nothing again.

"Four numbers seem a little too few to me," Pete said. He tried it again with a few different number orders including Jelena's birth year, but nothing happened.

Pete sighed. "The idea was good."

Jelena snapped her fingers. "Try my mother's birthday, 12th September Fifty-Six."

Pete repeated the date while turning the little metal wheel: "One-two-uh, what month is September?"

"Ninth," Bob helped him out with a grin on his face.

"... Zero-nine-five-six," Pete continued. "Sesame open!"

He pulled the handle and silently swung open the heavy steel door.

"Wow!" Bob praised. "Congratulations, Jelena. That was the bright idea."

"Jupiter did the groundwork," she waved off and surprised the First Investigator for the second time.

In the compartments of the safe there were some flat boxes. "Hand me the boxes!" Jelena said.

Pete carefully took them out of the safe and gave it to her. She lay down on her lap and looked at them one by one. Names in Cyrillic letters, the Russian alphabet, were written on the box covers.

"Can you read that?" Pete asked fascinated, who was completely unfamiliar with the alphabet.

She nodded. "A little, anyway. I only went to school in America, but when I learned to read and write, my father said that it wouldn't hurt if I could learn my mother tongue." She laughed. "I wasn't very good in it as I messed up the letters from time to time. My teachers weren't very impressed."

She looked at the boxes again. "Here it is—*The Original Works of Pavel Mogorov*." Carefully she opened the box. There were several folders, each was neatly labelled with the title of the respective piece in the upper left corner. In each folder was a set of carefully layered pieces of paper—music scores, as The Three Investigators noticed. Jelena took one set out. The paper was completely yellowed and the formerly black ink was now pale brown.

They were almost afraid that the paper would crumble at any moment. Jelena looked at it for a moment, put it back in the box and took out the next folder of music scores.

"And?" Bob asked curiously. "Is *Peisinoë's Song* there?"

Jelena shook her head absently as she leafed on. The stack that she had not yet looked through shrank and with it The Three Investigators' hope of finding the solution to the puzzle.

Suddenly Jelena's face lit up. "Here it is!" she shouted and held up a sheet of music. "*Peisinoë's Song*, there it is!"

"Be careful!" Jupiter warned. "Otherwise the paper will break." He bent down to look at the music score sheets. "Can you do anything with it?"

"It's a music score," Jelena replied calmly. "A piece for solo violin. I could play it for you if you wanted."

"Maybe later. Now we should consider what to do with our find."

"If Vanderhell is really after these scores, we have to get it to safety as soon as possible," Bob said. "Do you know a safe place to hide it?"

Jelena did not answer, but stared into emptiness with closed eyes.

"Hey, Jelena!" Bob said. "Did you hear me—"

"Shh!" she whispered and raised her hand. "I hear a car."

The three listened and now they heard it too—a car approached the house.

Jelena recognized the sound of the engine. "My father! He's coming back!" She looked at her watch. "An hour earlier than expected!"

"Come on, put everything back in the boxes!" Jupiter shouted. "Except *Peisinoë's Song*."

In a furious hurry they put the folders of music scores back into boxes and returned them back into the safe.

“What was the order of the boxes?” Pete asked excitedly.

“Doesn’t matter!” Jelena shouted. “There is no time for that. Come on, get out of here!”

The Second Investigator closed the safe door, turned the combination lock and left the study with the others.

“Where to put it?” Jelena asked and waved the folder hectically.

“Give me that!” Jupe shouted and snatched the folder from her hands. “I’ll hide it!” He rushed to the gallery.

“We must go down, or my father will wonder what we’re all doing up here,” Jelena said hurriedly. “On the upper floor there are only his rooms and the guest room.”

There wasn’t time for Jelena to get to the lift. Bob and Pete grabbed her wheelchair at the same time and wanted to carry her down the stairs.

“Hey!” she shouted. “You’ll throw me out of the chair! A little more cautious, if you don’t mind.”

When they reached the end of the stairs, Pete and Bob had just safely placed the wheelchair down when the door to the hall opened. Mr Charkov and Vanderhell came in. Both looked at the visitors in surprise.

“Hello, Jelena.”

“Hi, Papa. Bob came to visit and brought his friends Jupiter and Pete with him,” she said.

“Hello!” the three of them said like out of one mouth and smiled at the two men.

“How nice,” Mr Charkov replied.

“I was just showing them the house,” Jelena added and then turned to them. “Now you have seen everything. Shall we go to my room?”

“Yes, very well,” Pete said.

“Why not?” Bob added, in order to escape from this situation as quickly as possible. When he walked past Vanderhell, he did not let the two men out of his sight. He looked at them with a fixed face until they walked up the stairs. Only when they arrived in Jelena’s room did they breathe a sigh of relief.

“That was a close one,” Jupiter groaned.

“I guess you can say that,” Pete agreed with him. “And what happens now?”

“I’ll wait for a good moment and tell my father everything I know,” Jelena said.

“What about Vanderhell? If your father believes you and confronts him, he will probably just run away,” Jupiter interjected.

“How stupid do you think I am?” Jelena snapped. “I will of course tell my father to let Vanderhell believe that we are not suspecting anything. Because without evidence, we can’t even alert the police.”

“And what do you think this evidence looks like?” Jupiter asked.

Jelena made an annoyed face. “You ask me that? You’re the master detective. We need to find this drug. That should be enough evidence.”

“We weren’t very successful today,” the First Investigator said.

“We must catch him in the act,” Jelena replied. “For example, tonight at Vanderhell’s hopefully last appearance. But until then, I have to get my father on our side. That’s why you better get out of here.”

“Shouldn’t we be there when you tell your father the whole story?” Bob asked.

“I’d rather do it alone. After all, he doesn’t even know you.”

“All right. Will you inform us?” Bob asked.

“Sure. I’ll call you tonight before the concert and let you know my plan—if I have one by then.” She grinned when she saw the three unsettled detectives. “Trust me!”

“If Jelena doesn’t have a plan tonight, we should think about something,” Jupe said when they were sitting at Headquarters half an hour later. “Or she’ll mess everything up.”

“She said we should trust her,” Pete reminded him.

But Jupe shook his head. “I’d rather trust myself. I don’t like that we have to rely on her without knowing what she is up to.”

“Now you see the situation we were always in when you don’t want to reveal your secrets,” Bob blasphemed. “Pretty annoying, isn’t it?”

Jupiter wanted to make an arrogant remark when the phone rang. He turned on the loudspeaker and picked up the phone. “The Three Investigators. Jupiter Jones speaking.”

“It’s me, Jelena... Can you come back?”

“Come again? When?” Jupiter asked.

“It would be best if you could come now.”

Jupiter frowned. Jelena sounded strangely nervous.

“Is anything wrong?” he asked carefully.

“What should be wrong? My father wants to talk to you,” she snapped.

“Did you tell him everything?”

“Yes.”

“And? Does he believe you?”

“He... is not conclusive and would like to talk to you.”

Jupe sighed and glanced at his two friends. They nodded in agreement. “All right, we’ll come now. Have you thought about what we’re gonna do tonight?”

“We can discuss that when you’re here,” Jelena said. “You should definitely be prepared for anything.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“Uh... just be prepared in general.”

“I am not sure if I can follow you, but you have to tell us in detail what it is about.”

Jelena grumbled a consent.

“All right. See you soon!” Jupiter hung up and looked at the phone confused.

“This is weird,” Pete said and turned to Bob. “Does she do that often? You know her a little better than us.”

Bob shrugged his shoulders at a loss. “Not any better.”

“Something’s wrong,” Jupiter murmured. “Maybe her father thinks she’s crazy after telling him this story. So let’s get ready to convince him.” Jupiter grabbed his jacket, and together they left Headquarters.

Twenty minutes later, when they knocked on the front door of the Charkovs, Jelena immediately opened it as if she had been waiting behind the door. She looked distraught, her face pale. “There you are,” she said in a low voice. She didn’t make any effort to let the three of them in.

“Shall we stay out here?” Jupiter asked sarcastically.

Without a word, Jelena rolled back a bit and made room.

“Where’s your father?” Bob asked carefully.

She pointed to the left. “In the kitchen.”

She closed the front door and pushed open another glass swing door that led to a living room. She set herself in motion and crossed the living room until she reached a slightly opened door. She swung it open. Behind it, there was a large, modernly-furnished kitchen that stood out from the old-fashioned style of the house.

It wasn't until The Three Investigators entered the kitchen that they saw Mr Charkov sitting on a chair at the kitchen table. He was tied up and stared at them with his eyes widened in fear.

"What's going on here," Jupiter began, horrified.

"What's going on here? I think you know that very well." A bright, metallic voice came from just outside the kitchen door. Vanderhell stood there and looked at them in his usual cold manner. There was no emotion to be read from his deathly pale face. But they could clearly see that he held a gun in his hand.

14. Trapped!

The three of them didn't move when Vanderhell pointed his gun at them.

"I'm sorry," said Jelena. "He was standing behind one of the columns in the hall, aiming that gun at me all the time. I was forced to get you here!"

"It's all right, Jelena, it's not your fault," Bob tried to calm her down. Then he turned to Vanderhell and said, "What do you want from us?"

"I just want you safe in one place... for now," he replied coldly.

"He overheard my father and me," Jelena explained. "I hadn't got very far with my explanations yet, when he suddenly stood with his gun at the doorway."

"I would never have thought that of you, Vanderhell," Mr Charkov spoke now. "I thought you were a musical genius, but you're nothing but a ruthless and greedy scammer!"

"What makes you think I care about money?"

"What else?" Mr Charkov said.

"You don't know yet?" interfered Jupiter, who had overcome his fright. He first looked at Mr Charkov, then at Jelena questioningly.

"So far I could do was to tell him about Vanderhell's little tricks," Jelena said. "I didn't get any further."

"He wants *Peisinoë's Song*," Jupiter explained and saw Mr Charkov gasping for air in surprise. Jupiter turned to the devil violinist. "That's the way it is, isn't it, Mr Vanderhell?"

Vanderhell sparkled angrily at Jupiter from his dark eyes. "How do you know about that?"

The First Investigator retreated involuntarily. He didn't force himself to show fear. "It doesn't matter. It's a fact that you'll never find *Peisinoë's Song*."

The devil violinist walked towards Jupiter with two long steps and stopped right in front of him. He was taller than the First Investigator by more than one head.

"Where's 'Peisinoë's Song'?" Vanderhell hissed. "Tell me!" When Jupiter didn't answer immediately, Vanderhell held the gun to his chest.

"If you shoot me, you'll never know," Jupiter said in a trembling voice.

"If you, little fatso, found it, I'll will as well," Vanderhell was convinced.

"But they're not where they were," the First Investigator said. "I hid them elsewhere."

Vanderhell frowned. "You hid what?" he asked, puzzled.

"I'm saying that I took them and hid them elsewhere," Jupiter repeated.

Vanderhell's face darkened. "What do you mean 'them'? How many do you have?"

Jupiter didn't know what he meant. "I'm referring to the music score sheets. What are you talking about, anyway?"

The devil violinist took a step back with the gun still pointed at Jupiter. Then his mouth slowly twisted into a diabolical smile, which gradually turned into a broad grin. Finally, a shrill laugh rang through the kitchen. The Three Investigators and Jelena looked at each other in confusion. Only Mr Charkov looked scared. Jupiter had the feeling that Jelena's father knew more than he had ever let anyone know.

"The music score?" shouted Vanderhell, who could hardly keep himself from laughing. "You seriously thought I'd cast all this magic over some ridiculous scrap of paper? Or for a

few thousand dollars I might get for that?"

"But... but you said you wanted *Peisinoë's Song*," Pete replied, confused. "Pavel Mogorov's piece of music."

"*Peisinoë's Song*?, yes," Vanderhell confessed. "But not the music score. I want the violin!"

"The violin?" Jupiter asked without understanding. "What violin?"

When Vanderhell didn't answer him, he turned to Mr Charkov. "What kind of violin, Mr Charkov? You know what's going on here, don't you?"

Jelena's father bowed his head in a devastated way. Then he nodded. "I had hoped that the violin had been forgotten."

"What violin?" Jelena asked, surprised. "Why don't I know about this, Papa?"

"It is a Stradivarius that once belonged to me," Mr Charkov said slowly. "It's called '*Peisinoë's Song*'."

"A Stradivarius?" Jelena gasped in surprise.

"Who's got it?" Vanderhell came back in. "Who'd you sell it to?"

Charkov didn't answer.

"Who?" the devil violinist hissed and pointed the gun at Mr Charkov's forehead.

Mr Charkov stared at him. His eyes flickered with fear, he whispered a name.

"Who?" Vanderhell suddenly shouted that everyone was startled with terror.

"Dr Stevenson," Mr Charkov repeated louder. "Dr Ludwig Stevenson."

Vanderhell frowned for a moment. "He was on the list. Why was he not here?" Jelena's father looked uncertainly over to Bob.

Vanderhell whirled around and walked up to Bob. "What do you know about Stevenson?"

Bob scared a few steps back until he was stopped by the fridge. "I... I'm here in his place because I happened to get his invitation." Vanderhell closed his eyes for a moment and inhaled sharply. Then he roared in rage, grabbed a knife lying on the table, and bent over Mr Charkov.

"No!" Jelena called and desperately pushed her wheelchair to get ahead of Vanderhell.

With a jerk the devil violinist cut off her father's shackles and rudely pulled him up from the chair. "Go! To the basement! Everybody!" Vanderhell pointed his gun towards the door. "Come on!"

Bob was the first to move, followed by Pete, Jelena, Jupiter and finally Mr Charkov. Vanderhell stayed close behind them and made sure that everyone went slowly and quietly to the basement door. When Bob opened the basement door, Vanderhell motioned them to go down.

"Carry her down!" he shouted and pointed to Jelena. Bob and Pete grabbed the wheelchair and carried it carefully down the narrow, steep stairs.

At the bottom of the stairs, Vanderhell directed along a corridor towards a steel door. "Get in there!" he ordered. Bob opened the door. Behind it was a storeroom in which old furniture and cardboard boxes stood.

Bob turned on the light and went inside. After all of them were inside the storeroom, Vanderhell stood at the doorway. Mr Charkov turned and asked: "What are you going to do now?"

He smiled coldly. "I'm gonna go to Dr Stevenson's and get '*Peisinoë's Song*'! And Mr Charkov, give me the keys to your car." Mr Charkov had no choice but to toss him his car keys.

“And what about us?” asked Jelena, but Vanderhell didn’t pay any attention to her, but closed the door with a loud bang. A moment later they heard the key being turned around in the lock, then the footsteps went away.

“Great,” sighed Jelena. “Now what?”

“Now Pete will free us,” Jupiter replied and smiled superiorly. “You have it with you, don’t you?”

The Second Investigator grinned. “Sure. Always. He reached into his back pocket and pulled out a small black case. When he opened it, they saw numerous small metal hooks—Pete’s lock pick collection. With an expert’s eye he looked at the lock, pulled out a suitable lock pick and set to work.

But just a second after the lock pick had been inserted into the keyhole, he pulled it out again and showed a disappointed face. “He left the key in there.”

“Can’t you push it out?” Bob asked hopefully.

Pete tried, but after a while he gave up. “I can’t.”

Bob and Jupiter let their shoulders sink in resignation. There was no other door and no window. The door was massive, they couldn’t possibly break it open.

“So then we’re trapped,” Jupiter remarked. “We must wait.”

He turned to Mr Charkov. “But now you can tell us what it all means. What’s the deal with ‘Peisinoë’s Song’?”

15. The Curse of the Devil's Violin

"That cursed instrument," Mr Charkov murmured. "If only I'd known Vanderhell was after that!"

"What kind of violin is that?" Jelena wanted to know. "I've never heard of it!"

"That was the intention," Mr Charkov explained. "No one should ever hear of this devil's violin again. But I'd better tell you the story from the beginning.

"I'm sure you've heard of Antonio Stradivari before. He was a violin maker in Italy in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries—the violin maker *par excellence*! He made by far the most perfect violins in the world. Many have been destroyed or lost over the centuries. A Stradivarius today is one of the most valuable musical instrument in the world."

Pete frowned. "Can you still play on them when they're so old?"

"Of course! For such an instrument, the older it is, the better it gets—and more significantly, the more valuable it is. A Stradivarius can be worth a million dollars today."

Bob was gasping for air. "A million dollars? For a piece of wood?"

Mr Charkov looked at him disapprovingly. "A Stradivarius is certainly not just a piece of wood. The production and processing of these violins are so perfect that, despite modern technology, no one has ever succeeded in building an instrument that is comparable in any way. It is said that he who plays on a Stradivarius plays the music of the angels—or of the devil."

"And you were in possession of a Stradivarius?" Jupiter asked.

Mr Charkov nodded. "'Peisinoë's Song'. For decades it was considered a legend. It is said that Stradivari gave names to the violins which he himself considered to be his very best. This particular one was named 'Peisinoë's Song'."

"Named after one of the sirens in Greek mythology," Jupiter added. "We know that much by now."

Mr Charkov continued: "There is a curse upon it. Some old books say that the devil himself had his fingers involved in the making of the violin. Everyone who heard music from the violin was haunted by misfortune—illnesses, accidents, deaths. But it never struck the one who played the instrument, as if it protected its owner from the curse.

"It is said that even the famous Paganini had once acquired the violin. But shortly afterwards his father died and Paganini sold 'Peisinoë's Song'. No one kept the instrument for long. At first most people thought the curse was a fairy tale, but as soon as they felt it, they couldn't get rid of the violin fast enough. Because the owner changed so often, it was almost impossible to keep track of the violin until one day, it was considered lost.

"I've been looking for it for years. When I was still a student, I studied Stradivari and came across the story of 'Peisinoë's Song'. I followed its trail as far as I could, but at some point, the information seeped away. Some musicologists believed that the violin had been destroyed in a war. Others claimed that it never existed, that it was nothing more than a myth. After a time, I too believed that I was on the trail of a lie for years—until one day when, by pure coincidence, 'Peisinoë's Song' fell into my hands."

"How?" Bob asked when Mr Charkov stopped talking.

“As you know, I collect old handwritten music scores. One day, I heard that the estate of Pavel Mogorov was to be sold. His heirs, who were still in possession of many of his items, urgently needed money. I more or less blindly bought up the entire estate. Among them were mainly music scores, but also some instruments—including a violin that was so good that I soon realized that I had bought a real masterpiece. The former owners apparently had no idea of the value of the violin. I examined the violin and discovered, very small and almost faded, the signature inside the body—it was ‘Peisinoë’s Song’.

“You can imagine how I felt. I had rediscovered a legend that had been lost for almost two centuries! To this day I have not been able to find out exactly how it got to Russia and into the possession of Pavel Mogorov. But I realized that his violin piece *Peisinoë’s Song* was not composed by coincidence. He had written it especially for the violin of the same name!”

“But why did you keep the whole thing a secret?” Bob wanted to know. “That was a sensation! Or were you afraid of the curse?”

“Not at first. But I acquired the violin shortly before we emigrated to America. There was little time to share my discovery with the music community. And when I was here with my wife and daughter, there were too many other things to do. After we settled in a few months later, I thought of the violin again. I took it out and played on it. A truly masterful instrument, the best violin I have ever held in my hands.

“Every day I played something for my wife and daughter. Shortly afterwards Jelena was hit by a car. Since then...” He paused.

“I’ve been in a wheelchair ever since,” Jelena added. “But you’re not seriously saying that has anything to do with the violin?”

“I didn’t believe it at first,” Mr Charkov continued in a low voice. “But soon after, your mother fell seriously ill. She didn’t survive her first year in America. Then it became clear to me that by playing on the Stradivarius, I had caused the misfortune. It’s an instrument of the devil!”

Jelena stared at him and swallowed. “But my accident and Mama’s illness—they were nothing but two terrible coincidences! What do they have to do with the violin?”

“I was lucky all my life—until the day I played ‘Peisinoë’s Song’ for the first time. From then on my life went off the rails—your accident, your mother’s illness, followed by her death... It must have been the violin. Why shouldn’t all the legends surrounding this devil’s instrument be true? It’s bad luck when you play it.”

He cleared his throat and continued: “But that was not all. ‘Peisinoë’s Song’ fascinated me terribly. The sound was so perfect—I just had to keep playing it all the time! Sometimes I had the feeling that the violin forced me to pick it up and play it. It was like an addiction!”

“What did you do with the violin?” Jupiter wanted to know.

“I told a friend about it—Ludwig Stevenson,” Mr Charkov said. “He is a colleague at the Santa Monica Conservatory of Music and collects old instruments. A few months before my wife passed away, I asked him to buy the violin from me, of course, for a friendly price. I couldn’t bring myself to destroy it, but I didn’t want it anywhere near me either. He had to promise not to tell anyone about the instrument.”

“But then you exposed him to the curse!” Pete exclaimed in astonishment.

Mr Charkov laughed briefly. “No, Ludwig only plays the piano. He can’t play the violin at all. That’s why I turned to him.”

“And why didn’t you just keep ‘Peisinoë’s Song’ in a safe deposit box?” Bob wanted to know.

“I was afraid of myself. ‘Peisinoë’s Song’ had such a mysterious attraction that I feared I could not withstand it.”

“One thing I don’t understand,” Bob said. “How did Vanderhell get to you?”

“I’d like to know that, too,” Mr Charkov confessed and bowed his head.

“Perhaps Vanderhell is a musicologist and has succeeded in following the trail of the devil’s violin all the way to you,” Bob said.

The face of the First Investigator brightened. He snapped his fingers and shouted enthusiastically: “Exactly! That makes sense! Vanderhell probably spent years searching for ‘Peisinoë’s Song’, and he somehow traced it to you. He guessed that either you or perhaps one of your friends had the instrument. So he came up with this ingenious plan. He knew that you would make your large hall available for small musical events. He got acquainted and got to give his first concert for eligible people.

“In the meantime, while he was staying here, he also searched around but he didn’t find the violin because it was not here. Therefore, he had to resort to continue giving concerts night after night and—”

“And the aim of the exercise,” Jelena interrupted, “was that because of his beguiling music somebody would finally give up the violin. That’s why he always stressed how bad his instrument was! He didn’t want to distract us from his violin, as I had first suspected. On the contrary, he wanted to draw attention to it!”

“So he is basically saying that if you give me a Stradivarius, my music will be so wonderful that you’ll never get over it,” Bob added. “Great plan! But unfortunately it didn’t work out, because ‘Peisinoë’s Song’ is now Dr Stevenson’s property.”

“And as luck would have it, Dr Stevenson wasn’t here and you had his invitation.” Jelena wiped her forehead with her hand. “What luck. Otherwise Vanderhell and the Stradivarius would be long gone.”

“Luck?” Pete shouted. “We’re trapped in a storeroom here and have no idea if we’ll ever get out again! I wouldn’t exactly call that luck.”

“Don’t get upset, Pete,” Jupiter reassured him. “We’ll get out of here somehow.”

“I hope so, too,” Mr Charkov intervened. “We must call the police as soon as possible! Who knows what Vanderhell’s would do to Ludwig. This guy’s capable of anything.”

Suddenly Jelena put her head aside. “Shh! I think someone’s coming!”

Now the others heard it too. Footsteps approached—fast, energetic steps.

Then Vanderhell’s voice sounded: “Get away from the door! I still have a gun!” The key was turned around and the door was opened. The devil violinist stood in the storeroom entrance and stared darkly at the prisoners. “Where is it?”

Jupiter was irritated. “Who?”

“The violin, ‘Peisinoë’s Song’, where is it?”

“What are you talking about?” Jupiter asked. “You just saw Dr Stevenson. He has—”

“It’s here!” Vanderhell yelled suddenly. His pale face turned slightly reddish and his eyes glowed. “The violin is here in this house!” He gasped with anger and turned to Mr Charkov. “You’ve known it all along and made a fool of me!”

“What?” Mr Charkov started and took a step back. “What are you talking about? Here in the house? Dr Stevenson has the Stradivarius, I thought you went to his place.”

“Do you think I would have come back again if I’ve got it?” screamed Vanderhell. His metallic voice hurt their ears. “Stevenson has returned the violin! To your wife!”

Mr Charkov stood there thunderstruck.

Jelena turned pale. “Excuse me?”

“Stevenson swore on his life that many years ago he gave ‘Peisinoë’s Song’ back to your terminally-ill wife after she asked him to. She wanted the violin to be back with her family if

one day you and your daughter were to face bad times and you needed money badly.” Mr Charkov said nothing.

“You actually know nothing about it?” Vanderhell continued in surprise. His anger was almost gone. “The violin is in this house the whole time and you didn’t know it?” Suddenly he started laughing. “But don’t worry, I’ll find it.”

He took two steps backwards to leave the room when Mr Charkov asked: “Where’s Stevenson?”

Vanderhell laughed briefly. “In his house. Don’t worry, he’s alive. But I made sure he didn’t get in my way.” He slammed the door and locked it. His footsteps faded.

16. Flight Forward

“Brrr... This guy’s really creepy,” Pete said. “But can it be true? Is the violin hidden here somewhere?”

“Why has she never told me anything about it? Why didn’t Dr Stevenson tell me about it either?” Mr Charkov whispered absently, as if he hadn’t heard Pete’s questions at all.

“Papa, I—” began Jelena.

“She brought the violin back!” Mr Charkov exclaimed. “But she knew that I wanted it out of the house—which was probably why she didn’t tell me about it!”

“But she meant well!” Jelena threw in. “And as you can see, even though the violin might be in the house, it brought us no misfortune in the last ten years.”

Mr Charkov was silent.

“It has an advantage that your mother brought back the violin,” Bob interfered carefully. “If it was still with Dr Stevenson, Vanderhell would have had it by now.”

“But now he’s probably turning the whole house upside down,” Jelena said.

“Do you have any idea where the Stradivarius might be?” Jupiter asked.

“What a joke!” Jelena hissed. “Half an hour ago, I didn’t even know it existed. And until five minutes ago, I had no idea it was hidden here.”

“It must be in a place that is so inaccessible that even in ten years you can’t come across it by accident—but at the same time, so obvious that you can find the violin if you’re looking for it,” Jupiter thought.

“There’s no such thing,” Jelena claimed. “I know every corner of this house. A violin is relatively large. You can’t just hide it without noticing it sooner or later.”

“Maybe Vanderhell was lying,” Bob thought. “Or Dr Stevenson.”

Mr Charkov shook his head. “If Vanderhell treated him as brutally as he treated us, Ludwig must have told the truth.”

Jupiter pinched his lower lip. “Think, people, where would you hide a violin?”

For a moment there was silence.

“I’m just thinking of something else,” Bob finally said. “Jupe, where did you hide the music score?”

Jupiter laughed quietly. “My hiding place is not half as brilliant as I would have Vanderhell believe. I simply put the folder behind the pedestal of one of the sculptures. I think it was the skull—” He stopped suddenly.

“What’s the matter, Jupe?” Pete asked anxiously as he noticed the First Investigator’s staring gaze.

“—Sculpture,” Jupe finished his sentence. “That’s it! A sculpture! She hid it in a sculpture!”

Jelena, Mr Charkov, Bob and Pete looked at him silently for a few seconds and checked Jupe’s theory in their minds.

“That must be it!” Bob shouted first.

“You’re right, Jupe,” Pete said too.

“Not bad at all,” Jelena had to admit. “This is actually the only way.” She turned to her father. “Mama knew how much you care about her works of art and that you would never sell

a single sculpture. So she could be sure that the violin would always remain in our possession. ‘Peisinoë’s Song’ must be in one of the sculptures she made when she was sick—which was...” She paused.

“The last one?” asked Charkov and looked down, shocked.

“Fiddling Death,” Jelena said. “The skull shape you just spoke of, Jupiter.”

Jupiter swallowed.

Jelena continued: “She knew she was going to die. In her last work, she dealt with death. Anyway, that’s what I believed so far. I always hated that character, but she insisted on working on it.”

“The violin in the hand of Fiddling Death is a hint and at the same time a warning,” Bob said. “But one thing I don’t understand—Jelena or you would never have thought that ‘Peisinoë’s Song’ was still in the house. Even if you were in financial trouble, you wouldn’t have looked for it.”

“Another mystery to solve,” Jupe remarked. “But there’s time. Now we should try to get out of here. It’s only a matter of time before Vanderhell’s rage devastates the whole house. Sooner or later he may destroy the sculptures. We’ve got to stop him somehow!” He pinched his lower lip as he looked around. “We can’t get the door open, that’s for sure. But there must be a way!”

“Maybe we can get the door open after all,” Jelena disagreed.

“The key is inserted from the outside,” Jupiter reminded her. “You wouldn’t want to unhook it, would you?”

“No,” Jelena replied and took a strip of chewing gum out of her trouser pocket. She put it in her mouth and started chewing.

“Can you think better when you chew?” Pete joked. “Jupe is always fidgeting with his mouth.”

The First Investigator quickly took his hand off his lower lip and gave him a poisonous look. “Do you have a suggestion or would you rather chew gum?” he asked Jelena.

“Wait and see,” she replied and continued to chew with pleasure.

The First Investigator shook his head without understanding and considered with his friends and Mr Charkov how they could escape from their prison. But they came to no satisfactory result.

Until Jelena suddenly asked, “Does anyone have a pen?”

Jupiter reached into the inside pocket of his jacket and handed her a pencil. Jelena took the chewing gum out of her mouth and stuck it to its tip.

“Hey! What are you doing?” Jupe said angrily. “That’s my favourite pencil!”

“You’ll get a new one from me,” Jelena promised. “And now watch this!” She reached for a stack of old magazines in a cardboard box at the corner. With a jerk she tore the envelope off and smoothed it.

“What are you up to?” Jupiter asked, half angry, half curious.

Jelena still didn’t answer. She rolled to the door, bent down and pushed the paper through the wide gap between the door and the floor. Then she put the chewing gum pencil through the keyhole and waited. “It has to stick properly first,” she explained.

“What has to stick?” Pete wanted to know.

“The gum on the key. So I can use the pencil to turn the key around.”

“It’ll never work!” Pete disagreed. “The pencil will never stick to the key so firmly that you can unlock it with it.”

Jelena smiled confidently. “I never said that either. But I can turn it now, which you didn’t succeed in doing. And then I’ll push it out of the keyhole.”

“Wow!” called Pete. “So that I can unlock the inside with my lock pick! Genius!”

“There’s no need to do so,” Jelena replied and carefully turned the pencil. The three of them and Mr Charkov were eager to see what happened. The key scraped in the lock and finally landed on the floor with a soft ring. Jelena bent over and reached for the sheet of paper. Carefully she pulled it in. The key was on the paper. She picked it up and presented it triumphantly to her amazed audience.

Bob and Pete applauded enthusiastically. “Bravo, Jelena! That was brilliant! Even Jupiter didn’t think of that!” The Second Investigator boxed Jupiter friendly in the side. “Isn’t that right, Jupe?”

Jupe said nothing. He also didn’t make a face.

“Time to disappear,” Jelena decided, put the key in the lock and opened the door.

“Maybe it’s better if only one person goes up and calls the police,” Mr Charkov thought.

“But together we have a chance to take Vanderhell by surprise,” Bob suggested. “I’ll see if the air is clear.”

The basement corridor was dark and deserted in front of them. Bob and Pete went ahead. At the end of the corridor, Bob ran up the stairs the basement door and listened. Nothing was heard. Then he gently pushed the handle down. The door was locked.

“Pete!” he whispered. “Come up!” Pete followed him, but when the Second Investigator looked at the keyhole, he shook his head in resignation. “This is a security lock. I can’t get this opened with a normal lock pick.”

“Not with a normal lock pick? What do you need?” Bob asked.

He laughed quietly. “The experience of a professional burglar. Or a load of explosives.”

They returned down the stairs to the others. “This won’t work,” Pete announced.

“Vanderhell locked the door and the lock is a size too big for me.”

“What do we do now?” Bob wanted to know.

“There is another way,” said Jelena, turning her wheelchair without a word and rolling into another basement corridor.

“Another staircase?” asked Jupiter.

“No. Something better.”

After another turn-off they reached a large metal sliding door, which could be opened sideways by two handles in its centre.

“The freight lift!” Jupiter shouted in surprise.

“Quickly recognized,” Jelena sarcastically replied. “This will take me to the ground floor and I can call the police and open the basement door for you. But first, I have to get the lift down here.” She promptly pressed a button and a loud rumbling sound was heard.

“That is an awfully loud sound!” Bob remarked. “What if Vanderhell hears this?”

“This thing makes a lot of noise, yes, but we have no alternative,” Jelena said as the lift slowly moved from the ground floor to the basement.

When the rumbling stopped, Jelena determinedly tore the two handles apart with a jerk. The sliding doors squeaked loudly and opened up into the tiny lift.

“You want to go up? Wouldn’t you rather leave that to the boys?” Mr Charkov asked, startled.

“Well, it makes no difference if one of the boys or me goes upstairs.”

“What if Vanderhell catches you?” Pete said.

“He won’t shoot me,” Jelena replied.

“Maybe not. But he will stop you,” Jupiter said. “There should be two of us upstairs. Pete and I should go!”

“Me?” Pete shouted in horror.

“You’re crazy,” Jelena snapped at Jupiter. “Who do you think you are?”

“But he’s right, Jelena,” Mr Charkov found, too. “This is way too dangerous for—”

“For a girl in a wheelchair? When will you finally realize that I am an independent person, Papa?”

“When will you stop trying to prove something to us?” Jupiter asked bitingly.

Jelena pushed her chin forward angrily. “You stay out of this! I’ll go! And for a very simple reason—sometimes this thing has problems. If the lift gets stuck, I know how to get it moving again. You don’t. And we don’t have time for a basic course in lift operations.”

“Then we’ll go together,” Jupiter decided. “Also for a very simple reason—you can call the police while I open the basement door. Or the other way around. The faster we go, the better.”

He put one foot in the lift. The cabin was so low that he had to retract his head. “Come on!”

Jelena laughed. “I don’t think we can fit in there together. And it’s not just my wheelchair.”

“Try it!” Jupiter exclaimed.

Hesitantly, she set herself in motion and rolled over Jupiter’s right foot. “Oh, sorry.”

When finally both were inside, Jupiter sat half on her lap. “Close the door,” asked Jelena. “And then press the button, Jupiter, I don’t want to be stuck in here with you any longer than necessary.”

Jupiter smiled grimly. “The pleasure is all mine.”

“Take care!” called Mr Charkov.

“Good luck, guys,” Pete said before the door closed.

Suddenly it was pitch black inside the lift.

“There’s no light here?” Jupiter moaned.

“That’s one of the problems. Come on, push the button!”

“I can’t see a button anymore!”

Jelena sighed and reached out to press a button. The lift started moving with a loud rumble. The journey lasted only a few moments, but they were the longest moments in Jupiter’s life. The lift squeaked and clattered so loudly that the First Investigator was convinced that Vanderhell would receive them upstairs with his gun. When the lift finally stopped, he didn’t dare open the door. Then Jelena tore the metal handles apart. Bright light fell into the cabin. Vanderhell wasn’t there.

Jupiter wiped the cold sweat off his forehead. “I had no idea this thing was so loud!” he hissed.

“If we are lucky, he’s on the other side of the house and didn’t hear us,” Jelena said. “And if we’re unlucky, he’ll be here any minute.”

Jupiter operated the red toggle switch under which ‘Stop’ was written. “Before the others get the idea to follow us on this noisy path,” he explained and closed the lift door as quietly as possible.

“Let’s go,” said Jelena. “You call the police, I’ll free the others. The phone’s in the living room on the right. Good luck!” She rolled towards the basement door.

Jupiter looked at her until she had disappeared around the bend, then he went looking for the phone.

At any moment he expected to come across Vanderhell, but the devil violinist had probably not heard the lift. The First Investigator found the phone and picked it up. No dial tone! The line was dead. He pressed the switch hook a few times, but nothing happened. Then he shook the cable and tracked it to the junction box. It was cut off!

17. Fiddling Death

Jupiter gave a soft curse. There was probably no point in looking for another phone in the house. Vanderhell had been thorough. By that time, Jelena rolled into the living room.

"The key's not in the keyhole," she briefed him. "We can't open it. Did you get the police—"

"Vanderhell has cut the phone line," interrupted Jupiter, "I'm sneaking out of the house now to one of your neighbours to make the call."

"And what about 'Peisinoë's Song'? We should get the violin first. Otherwise, Vanderhell finds it and disappears before the police arrive."

"I'd rather say that if we look for the violin, Vanderhell will find us!" Jupiter disagreed.

"Come on, Jupiter, don't be like that! You can at least see if it is hidden somewhere in Fiddling Death," Jelena suggested.

"Why don't you go see for yourself?" Jupiter said, annoyed.

Jelena patted on the hand rims of her wheelchair. "Fiddling Death is in the gallery. I'd have to take the lift one more time. And didn't you think that thing was way too loud?"

Jupiter sighed. "All right. I'll get it. But—"

"But what?"

"But only if you promise me one thing."

"Whatever you say now, it's blackmail," Jelena said.

"No. It's a condition," Jupiter said seriously. "I'll go look for the violin now if you promise never to interrupt me again. I hate this!"

"Interrupt you? I never did that!"

Jupiter laughed quietly. "Just wait. I'll tell you the next time you do it."

Then he turned to the glass swing door that led into the hall and put his ear to it. "Not hearing anything doesn't mean he's not there," he whispered.

"You won't find out that way either," Jelena replied, pushing the door open.

Quietly, they took a peek into the hall, there was nobody and no sound. Then they quickly entered the hall. Soon, they heard a noise—something rumbled. It came from upstairs and sounded like someone was moving furniture.

"He's upstairs," Jelena said. "We have a clear path. Come on, up the stairs!"

Jupiter discontentedly pulled a face. "I should have made another condition—don't boss me around!"

Jelena nodded impatiently. "All right, now would you please go up the stairs there to check out Fiddling Death?"

"Well, there you go," Jupiter replied with a grin. Then he walked quietly up the stairs, always looking in the direction where the sound was coming from. He reached the gallery and the statue of Fiddling Death. Even at second glance he was frightened by the grinning skull. He was almost afraid to touch the figure. But then he called himself to order inside. This was a big chunk of stone, nothing more. There was no reason not to examine it.

The First Investigator carefully scanned the sculpture. Behind its pedestal was the folder containing the music score sheets of *Peisinoë's Song*, which Jupiter had hidden there a few

hours ago. He took it and hid it behind the adjoining statue before continuing to examine Fiddling Death.

He hoped to find a secret mechanism, but soon gave up hope. He couldn't find an opening. Jupiter took a questioning look down into the hall, where Jelena watched him attentively. She gestured for him to raise the figure. Jupiter tried, but the statue was much too heavy. So he tilted it over and carefully laid it on the floor.

It was hollow. There was a wooden case in the cavity. Jupiter grinned down to Jelena and put his thumb up. Then he carefully pulled the case out of the opening. It was more than half a metre long, but narrow and flat and had two flap fasteners on one side. Jupiter snapped it open and opened the lid. Carefully wrapped in a velvet cushion lay a violin. The red-brown wood shimmered in the light of the chandelier. Jupiter carefully stroked the smooth surface with his fingertips. This had to be 'Peisinoë's Song'. If he was honest, the violin wasn't any different from the others. He couldn't see the immeasurable value.

He took it out of the wooden case, closed it and pushed it back into the cavity of the statue. Then he carefully set the statue back up, took the Stradivarius in his hand and stretched it into the air in the winning pose. Jelena grinned.

Suddenly, a loud, shrill sound tore the air apart. Jupiter flinched and whirled. At the further end of the gallery, Vanderhell appeared and played on his violin a raging succession of high-pitched screeches that hurt the ears. Abruptly he broke off and took a step towards Jupiter.

"I don't know how you got out, but it's nice that you did the work for me." He pulled out his gun and pointed it at the First Investigator.

Jupiter got dizzy. The figure of the devil violinist blurred before his eyes. Vaguely, he realized that Vanderhell reached out his hand as he continued to walk towards him.

"Give it to me!" His voice pierced Jupiter's brain like a rusty knife. He retreated dazed, but after two steps he almost stumbled. He knew Vanderhell would catch him before he could reach the stairs.

"You have no chance of escaping," Vanderhell stated coolly. "Give me 'Peisinoë's Song' and I'll leave you and your friends alone!"

"It's at least four metres down from here," stammered Jupiter. Then he stretched his hand, in which he held the violin, over the balustrade. "I don't think this delicate piece of handiwork would survive such a fall.

"What do you mean?" Vanderhell's pale face became a little paler. He stopped abruptly. "You wouldn't dare!"

"You shouldn't expose anyone to your drug," Jupiter said. "There are people who become unpredictable under the influence."

To underline his words, he looked over the railing. The hall was distorted. Down below him, he recognized Jelena. She stretched out her arms and nodded encouragingly to him.

Vanderhell laughed quietly. "Good try, kid. But you're not bluffing me. The Stradivarius is worth at least a million dollars. You will not destroy it."

"I wouldn't be so sure about that," Jupiter replied and smiled.

The devil violinist looked at him grimly and walked towards him.

Jupiter dropped the violin.

"You should have believed me," Jupiter said, but his remark was lost in Vanderhell's shrill scream. He rushed the last steps towards the First Investigator.

The instrument sailed down, but the expected impact failed to materialize. Jelena caught the violin safely and sped off in her wheelchair towards the corridor.

Vanderhell roared in rage, dropped his instrument and wanted to run to the stairs, but Jupiter held him by his sleeve. The devil violinist broke loose and pushed Jupiter away. The First Investigator staggered backwards and hit the railing with such force that he rowed desperately with his arms not to fall down.

Panting, Jupiter held on to the railing. Vanderhell had meanwhile reached the bottom of the stairs and ran in the direction of the corridor where Jelena had disappeared to. Jupiter felt his dizziness ease. He broke away from the stiffness and ran down the stairs after the devil violinist.

Then he changed his mind. He had to get reinforcements! Jupiter ran to the freight lift and opened the door. He let the stop switch snap back and sent the lift down at the push of a button. That should be enough to signal to Pete and Bob to come up.

Without losing any more time, Jupiter went into corridor through another entrance and rushed towards Jelena's room. Vanderhell was at the doorway. In one hand he held the gun, in the other the violin.

When he noticed Jupiter, he turned to him. "It didn't work, did it, fat boy? I'm leaving now! With 'Peisinoë's Song'!" He walked backwards out of the corridor, with his gun pointing at Jupiter until he disappeared into the hall.

"Jelena!" Jupiter shouted and ran into the room. "Did something happen to you?"

Jelena looked at him distraught. "No, everything's fine."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes! Come on, we gotta go after him!" She gave her wheelchair a lot of momentum and stormed past Jupiter into the corridor. That's when they heard shots.

Jupiter stopped in horror. "Bob and Pete!" he whispered. "I sent the lift down!" He reached the hall with Jelena at the same time.

There stood Pete, Bob and Mr Charkov, all three intact.

Jupiter breathe a sigh of relief.

"There you are!" Pete shouted. "We heard gunshots! Where's Vanderhell?"

At that moment an engine howled outside. Tyres squealed and a car drove off.

Without another word, The Three Investigators rushed out and just saw Mr Charkov's car reach the road, turn and disappear behind the trees.

"We have to go after him!" Pete shouted and was about to rush to his car when Jupiter held him back.

"Forget it, Pete. Look at your tyres! Vanderhell shot them flat."

The Second Investigator stopped abruptly and looked at the mess. "Damn!" He turned around. "What about the violin? Do you have it?"

"We had it," Jupiter said, feeling remorse. "Vanderhell has taken it from us. Now he's gone over the mountains with 'Peisinoë's Song'."

"We have to do something!" Bob shouted. "The police! Have you called them?"

"He disconnected the phone," Jupiter added.

Bob ran off. He shouted, "I'll go to the neighbour's and make a phone call from there."

When he returned five minutes later, Jelena, Mr Charkov, Pete and Jupiter sat in the hall and looked silently at each other.

"I called Chief Reynolds," Bob gasped as he joined them. "Rocky Beach Police are launching a full-scale manhunt. If we're lucky, they'll catch him."

"And if not, 'Peisinoë's Song' will be gone forever," Pete said. "We have failed."

Jupiter turned angrily to Jelena. "If we had called the police right away, Vanderhell would have been arrested by now and the violin still in its place. But you wanted to find 'Peisinoë's Song' first!"

Jelena looked at him guiltily, but suddenly she began to giggle. The giggling swelled to a loud laugh.

“What’s the matter now?” Jupiter asked angrily. “Are you making fun of me?”

“No,” she laughed. “Wait a minute!” She left the hall and returned a short time later. There was a violin on her lap.

“May I present to you all,” she said, “‘Peisinoë’s Song’!”

18. Checkmate!

Two days later, Jelena met The Three Investigators at The Jones Salvage Yard. Since the wheelchair did not fit through the narrow door of Headquarters, they had made themselves comfortable in front of the trailer.

Aunt Mathilda's cherry pie and orange juice stood on one small table, a chessboard was set up on another table. Pete and Jupiter played a game while they talked to Jelena about the events of the last days. Bob was inside Headquarters to write the report on their just-concluded case.

"I still can't believe it," Pete said once again as he pulled his rook out of the firing line, threatening Jupiter's queen at the same time. "Replacing the Stradivarius with your own violin when you were in your room was really brilliant! And that within a few seconds. Well, I probably wouldn't have had so much presence of mind."

Jupiter smiled mockingly. "I can believe that." When he looked back at the chessboard, he frowned.

"I just wanted to hide 'Peisinoë's Song'," Jelena explained. "And what better place to hide it than in my own violin case? When Vanderhell suddenly stood at the doorway, I had my violin in my hand. He didn't even ask and didn't even look at it. He just snatched it from me."

"I wonder when he would have found out about the violin if the police hadn't caught him that same evening," Pete said. "I would have liked to see his face when he realized he's got a different instrument."

Pete took a quick look at Jupiter's pieces and then he moved his knight. Jupiter's forehead wrinkles got deeper and deeper. Slowly he pinched his lower lip.

"I have some news for you, by the way," Jelena said. "The police were with us again yesterday. Vanderhell has finally spoken out on how he released the chemical fumes in his performances."

Now the First Investigator looked up. "You could have asked me that," he said confidently.

"Why?"

"Because I know. When I held 'Peisinoë's Song' in my hands and Vanderhell was playing his violin vigorously with those high-pitched screeches, I had this terribly numbing feeling set in. I thought through everything again and came to the only logical result—the drug was always released when he played particularly high notes. So I'm assuming he hid a device that reacts to those sounds. It's like an alarm clock you can turn off with your voice. The device was activated as soon as a certain sound frequency reached it."

Pete frowned. "But we've searched the entire hall and found no device."

"Because it was not in the hall," Jupiter continued unflinchingly. "It's in the air conditioning shaft. It was the only way to distribute the fumes throughout the room without anyone noticing."

Jelena raised her eyebrows in surprise. "Well done, great master detective!"

Jupiter smiled superiorly. "Thank you."

"It's true," Jelena elaborated. "He had a kind of fog machine, which he installed in the air conditioning when he was alone in the house. It was connected to a sound sensor, which activated it as soon as high-pitched tones were played. The air conditioner then distributed the chemical fumes evenly throughout the room. The report of the police laboratory has arrived in the meantime. The bottle contained a mixture of different artificial drugs that a chemist has concocted."

"Withers," concluded the First Investigator. "The man Vanderhell met with that night at the park."

"That's right. They've also arrested him," Jelena said. "By the way, the drug had a special effect on acoustic perception. Therefore one had the feeling that the sounds of the violin were particularly clear and brilliant. But there were a number of side effects that we all felt."

"How did Vanderhell manage to be immune to the drug?" Pete asked Jelena.

"He wasn't immune," she replied. "He's an addict."

"Oh," Pete said. Then he casually made a move and grinned triumphantly. "That was your second bishop, Jupe. I've already taken seven of your pieces."

"I can see that," Jupiter growled.

"There's something else I'm not quite sure about," the Second Investigator continued. "Your mother wanted 'Peisinoë's Song' to remain in the family. Then why didn't she leave a hint of where she was hiding it? Without Vanderhell, you would never have found it."

"My father has now been able to find out," explained Jelena. "My mother knew that my father did not want the violin anymore. After she got it back, she left an instruction with our lawyer. In case of financial difficulties we would have contacted him. Then, he would tell us where the violin is hidden. In any case, I would have found out about it at the latest if my father died."

Pete nodded and turned his attention back to the game. "What's the matter with you today, Jupe? You seem to be having some real trouble in this game."

"No, what's wrong with you?" replied the First Investigator. "Did you secretly take lessons from Kasparov?"

"From whom?"

Jupiter waved off. "Forget it." He bent over the board again.

"What about the Stradivarius?" Pete asked, while Jupiter pondered about his next move.

"It's still in our house," Jelena said. "My father steers clear of it. So do I. But not because I'm afraid of it, but because I don't know how my father would react if I played on it. Actually I would love to do that. Who can claim to have played on a Stradivarius? But I think I'll leave it alone so as not to cause unnecessary anxiety."

"My father is thinking about handing over 'Peisinoë's Song' to a museum. After all, the whole story is in the newspapers today. The violin should leave the house as quickly as possible before anyone else comes up with the idea of stealing it."

Pete sighed. "Too bad, really. The violin was supposed to be some kind of a nest egg for you."

"Well, after all, my father would get a whole lot of money from the museum and he promised to invest it for me until I was of age."

"Then you'll be a millionaire! We should definitely stay friendly," Pete said with a grin as he moved his rook. "Check!"

The First Investigator looked at him seriously. "All right, Pete. How did you do it?"

"How did I do what?"

"Why are you suddenly so good at playing chess? What's the trick?"

“What are you even talking about? In chess there are no tricks, only logic and skill, you have said that again and again yourself.” Pete smiled confidently. “I’m just good. And you probably get checkmated in a few moves.”

Jupiter stared hard at the board. After a while, he made his move. Pete didn’t have to think long to counter him. “Check!”

Jupiter’s gaze glided over the pieces, over to Pete, over to Headquarters. He looked up at the roof and stopped.

“Aha!” he shouted. “I thought so! The camera!” With his finger he pointed to the video camera, which was mounted half hidden behind the periscope on the roof and pointed exactly to the chessboard.

Jupiter jumped up, went to Headquarters and opened the door. Bob was sitting at the desk in front of two computer monitors—one showed the picture taken by the video camera, the other was connected to the computer with the chess program Chandra on it.

“Cheaters!” Jupiter shouted, but then he laughed. “But pretty clever!”

“Ooooh,” Bob, Pete and Jelena were disappointed. “So he noticed!” Bob remarked.

“I’m on Chandra’s highest difficulty level,” Bob explained with a grin. “And then gave Pete a sign as to what move to make next.”

“Sign? How?” Jupiter asked.

Bob held up a small pocket mirror.

“With this. The sun is so favourable at the moment that I was able to use the mirror to throw Morse codes on the wall behind you.”

“All due respect,” Juve said and nodded approvingly. “You almost set me up.”

“Too bad you found out,” Jelena said.

“Sorry to have disappointed you,” Jupiter smirked. “You wanted to see me lose, didn’t you?”

She grinned broadly. “Absolutely.”

“But nothing will come of it,” the First Investigator replied aggressively. “Bet I can still beat Pete?”

Jelena looked at the board and grimaced. “You lost seven pieces and you’re in check. Pete only lost two pawns. I’ll bet you won’t win.”

Pete waved uneasily. “You shouldn’t do this, Jelena.”

“Oh, come on. Even Jupiter isn’t that good,” she said confidently.

Pete smiled, embarrassed. “Maybe not. But I’m so bad.”

Ten minutes later, Jupiter knocked over Pete’s king with his finger. “Checkmate!”